

THE TIWI: From Isolation To Cultural Change




***A History of Encounters Between an
Island People and Outside Forces***

John Morris

NTU PRESS



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***The Tiwi Islanders** are unique in Aboriginal society, possessing a distinct culture and language. Although isolated from mainland Aborigines for thousands of years, they had intermittent contact with visitors from Southeast Asia and Europe from at least the seventeenth century. **The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change** is an ethnohistory, exploring the reaction of the Tiwi to this exposure to outside cultures until 1918. The presence of buffalo shooters and missionaries in the early years of the nineteenth century signalled the beginning of social and cultural changes in Tiwi society.*

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WARNING

The names of some Tiwi people who are now deceased appear in the following pages, either as historical characters and/or as informants. Although the Tiwi community has now modified its customary law on the use of the names of people who have passed away, offence may be taken by some members of that community. The need to avoid such offence is recognised and acknowledged, and I apologise if any distress does occur. Similarly, I trust that the inclusion of photographs of deceased persons in this thesis will not lead to discontent.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ix
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1	The Traditional Tiwi - A Unique Society
	(Pre-Contact Years)
	10
CHAPTER 2	Survey, Intrusion and Conflict (The Distant Past to 1818)
	29
CHAPTER 3	Fort Dundas - Settlement of Doom (1824 - 1829)
	41
CHAPTER 4	The Widening World - Indonesians to Australians
	(1700 - 1894)
	60
CHAPTER 5	The Buffalo Shooters - The Opening Door
	(1895 - 1916)
	79
CHAPTER 6	The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and
	the Wider World. (1911 - 1918)
	104
CONCLUSION	133
APPENDIX A	139
BIBLIOGRAPHY	141
INDEX	157

FIGURES

Fig. 1	The political sub-divisions of the Tiwi Islands 15 (as listed by Esther Babui).	15
Fig. 2	The political sub-divisions of the Tiwi Islands (as in popular use) 15	15
Fig. 3	The Tiwi Totemic System (Yiminga) prior to 1945 17	17
Fig. 4	The Food Economy of the Tiwi People 23	23
Fig. 5	Rules to be Observed When at Anchor or in Harbour 47	47
Fig. 6	Regulations Relating to Vessels Arriving at Melville Island. 47	47
Fig. 7	Regulations Respecting the Natives, and the Carrying of Fire Arms. 49	49
Fig. 8	Vessels Known to be Wrecked or Grounded Around the Tiwi Islands 67 up to 1918	67
Fig. 9	Women Seized from the Mainland by the Tiwi, Nineteenth Century 70	70
Fig. 10	Tiwi Women Taken from their Bands by the Iwaidja Buffalo Shooters 86	86
Fig. 11	Protectors and Chief Protectors of Aborigines, 90 Northern Territory 1869-1919	90
Fig. 12	Government Residents and Administrators of the Northern Territory 94 1869-1918	94
Fig. 13	Religious Staff, Bathurst Island Mission, 1911-1918 112	112
Fig. 14	Tiwi Girls Purchased by Bishop Gsell to the End of 1918 120	120
Fig. 15	Tiwi Families of the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries 134	134

MAPS

Map 1	Location of the Tiwi Islands in Respect of Possible Outside Influences	5
Map 2	The Land of the Tiwi People	7
Map 3	The Tiwi Bands or Political Sub-Divisions	12
	(according to Babui and Ward)	
Map 4	The Tiwi Bands or Political Sub-Divisions	13
	(as in anthropological and wider use)	
Map 5	The Creative Travels of Mudungkala (Murtankala)	19
Map 6	Localities - Tiwi Islands.	34
Map 7	Fort Dundas and its Environs	42
Map 8	North Coast of New Holland/Northern Territory, Early Outposts	50
Map 9	The Tiwi and Neighbouring Tribes	69
Map 10	Location of Tiwi Islands in Relation to Arnhem Land	80
	and Daly River Region	

ILLUSTRATIONS

- 1 The late Jerry Kerinauia, keeper of Tiwi oral history
- 2A The late Albert Kulappaku Croker, keeper of Iwaidja - Tiwi oral history
- 2B The late Don Tipiamutta Hocking with his painting of the Purukupali story
- 3 Pukamuni Poles, Bathurst Island
- 4 Bark painting of Macassan proa wrecked on Melville Island
Artist Jerry Kerinauia
- 5 Fort Dundas, Melville Island. (Courtesy Mitchell Library)
- 6 Tiwi men seated in camp, Melville Island, 1912
(Courtesy Museum of Victoria)
- 7 Tiwi woman and children on beach at Nguiu
- 8A Joe Cooper on horseback. (Courtesy Northern Territory Library)
- 8B Harry Cooper's grave, Darwin
- 9 Early mission building, Nguiu, 1912. Father Gsell on right
(Courtesy Museum of Victoria)
- 10 Joe Cooper and Father Gsell (wearing coat) at Nguiu
Sisters inside fence, with, apparently, children from the mainland
11. Dugout canoes off Paru. (Courtesy Northern Territory Library)
- 12 D.M. Sayers, John Gilruth and Joe Cooper. (Courtesy Museum of Victoria)
- 13 Father (later Bishop) F.X. Gsell. (Courtesy *Hecate*)
- 14 Tiwi children in dugout canoe off Paru. (Courtesy Northern Territory Library)

(Unless otherwise indicated, the above photographs are from the Morris collection.)

These photographs are located near centre of book.

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and by the Catholic Missions documents and personnel over a long period of time is the correct one, and that the book fills in the gaps in their knowledge of their past. At the same time, the role of the Tiwi in their ethnohistory and their control of their own religious and other customs is fully acknowledged.

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Finally, very special mention is made of my daughter Jeanette, whose support and computer expertise in particular, was of vital assistance in the completion of this thesis, and of the patience and support of my wife, Elaine, over the years of my study and absence on field duties.

INTRODUCTION

Until the late 1960s, Australian indigenous history, or ethnohistory, did not have a written form. Early Australian colonies' history depicted Aborigines more as part of the landscape, including their brief comments in descriptions of the natural history of Australia. Historians spoke of Australia's peaceful settlement or of Aborigines being merely of nuisance value to the colonists. In more recent years academics, bureaucrats and others spoke *of* Aborigines and upon occasions *for* them, but indigenous voices were rarely heard in public, nor in print. Most historians considered indigenous people were incapable of expressing their thoughts and presenting their history.¹ A people who believed in a mythological Creation Period could have no history in a mainstream sense.

Historians such as Peter Corris and Henry Reynolds brought new and different opinions to the debate in their interpretation of documents which related to inter-cultural relationships on the frontier.² While Isabel McBryde had often stressed the long neglect of indigenous history in local historical and anthropological research, Reynolds claimed that "historiographical neglect of the Aborigines has been of a general rather than a specific nature."³ By the 1970s historical emphasis was changing rapidly. Many new publications focussed on contact history and race relations, and McBryde was right when she argued that "the general historian can no longer ignore" Aboriginal history.⁴ Historical experiences of indigenous people were now known and understood by the larger historical community rather than by only a comparatively few members of mainstream society.

Today relevant historical studies demonstrate a coming to terms with Australia's past. They also acknowledge the inadequacy of earlier historians. In Reynolds' words, "history is a legitimate scholarly discipline, whose purpose is to re-construct the past as accurately as the intelligence of the historian and the fullness of the historical sources permit."⁵ Researching into indigenous history, especially that of specific tribal groups, requires not only ethnographical knowledge of the target group, but also an awareness of the relevant historical issues.

There are two major concerns in ethnohistory: how do Aborigines and Islanders perceive history, and who owns and has access to that history? Most ethnographers who have written on the indigenous concept of history have agreed that "historical consciousness is absent or weakly developed" among indigenous Australians.⁶ Early anthropologists saw the "dreaming" as an alternative to history in the true sense, not as

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

a “lesser history”.⁷ This school of thought claimed that indigenous oral history was freely juxtaposed with the mythological past, the Creation Period. There was also a school of thought that argued that people with a spiritual belief, in which the distant past still exists today, were incapable of understanding that history is composed of a past which cannot continue to exist.⁸ These opinions are substantially weakened by the fact that researchers who have collected historical accounts from many indigenous informants indicate that the informants are completely aware of the secular past as distinct from the religious past.⁹

During my research into Tiwi ethnohistory, for example, it was clear that the Islander informants clearly distinguished between incidents in the history of their Creation Period and events in the history of their contact with outside peoples. Further afield, in the early 1970s, in an Arnhem Land village, male elders spoke of “Donald Thomson’s time”, that is Thomson’s peace-making in the region in the 1930s. They also spoke of Patrol Officer Syd Kyle-Little’s foot patrols there in the 1940s. Both of these excerpts from local oral history included recollection of minor details which demonstrated a good recall of these visitors, while not offering any association with the Creation Period or the spirit world in any way. There is now sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the earlier theories were incorrect, and that among Aborigines and Islanders there is a strongly developed historical consciousness. This was particularly noticeable among the Tiwi elders of a generation ago. While many indigenous people, especially in traditional communities, willingly impart knowledge of their prehistory and history to researchers, such information is part of the community’s past and heritage, and is therefore their intellectual property.

Accounts provided by Aboriginal and Islander groups are articulated through the format of stories passed down from witnesses to events in the historical past to succeeding generations, and these stories are accepted as being true and accurate. There are other forms in which such incidents and events are kept in the public mind of indigenous groups, such as songs, dances, art and genealogies. The Western historians’ obsession with dates and their desire to accurately locate oral history in time face several problems in Arnhem Land. Here the traditional indigenous people used a calendar based on the seasons, not on the western system of months and years. Attempting to locate approximate dates for incidents narrated in oral histories can therefore be difficult, especially where custom forbids using the names of the deceased. Many ethical issues surround the study of ethnohistory, particularly where the research includes oral histories and anthropological studies as well as the investigation of archival and other documentary material. In this respect, the two most important ethical issues are: who owns and controls knowledge, and what purposes will such knowledge be put to in the present and in the future?¹⁰ In other words, how and by whom will unwritten Aboriginal or Islander knowledge be reconstructed and shared, and what controls will be established to ensure that the target community in each case receives benefit from the research? In the field, researchers must be constantly aware of community protocols and ensure that consultation with group members is conducted in a non-paternalistic, non-patronising manner, while always avoiding customary taboos. Unfortunately, it has been claimed that much of the work by non-indigenous researchers has been counterproductive and racist, inaccurate or disrespectful of Aboriginal or Islander peoples.¹¹ Erroneous or incomplete ethnohistories can sometimes be blamed on the fact that a large amount of the relevant evidence is fragmentary or non-comprehensive.¹² In this book the emphasis is placed on a rigorous

search of both published and unpublished literature to ensure the widest possible range of data.

In 1982, the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress sought to give Aboriginal people greater control over, and involvement in, research into indigenous communities. In a declaration to the Anthropology section of ANZAAS, 1982, the Congress argued, among other things, that research should be conducted substantially *for* and *by* Aboriginal people and not just *on* indigenous people.¹³ In addition, non-invasive research approved by the target group should be of some benefit to Aboriginal people and not just to the researcher. Since then some urban Aboriginal and Islander people have gone even further, calling for the cessation of studies by non-indigenous researchers. Part of the overall Aboriginal and Islander society now seeks empowerment by reclaiming ownership of indigenous cultural knowledge and by claiming ownership of a desirably accurate and knowledgable history of the indigenous past. My book conflicts with this demand, but was written with Tiwi approval. In researching the history of the Tiwi people every care has been taken to ensure that all ethical issues have been considered. This, then, is a history *of* and *for* the Tiwi people. Unlike some indigenous Australians, they possess a proud interest in the secular history of their islands and their lives.

The Tiwi Islanders are a unique and distinct people among Australia's Aboriginal and Islander groups. They have survived, and grown from, encounters with other cultures over a long period of time. Like the Arnhem Land people, and some other remote communities, they have stayed in their traditional country and have always seen themselves as the owners. Due to their isolation they have also been able to avoid any large scale permanent outside intrusion. Politically they remain strong and perceived themselves as being different. The Tiwi have not been acculturated to the same extent that people in the south of Australia have been. Like the Torres Strait Islanders and some other remote communities, they accepted missionaries, and, as some of their mainland counterparts did, and still do, they reconciled Christianity with their traditional beliefs.

In Australia, relatively little ethnohistorical research has been conducted into remote groups such as the Tiwi Islanders. A number of anthropological, social, economic, and artistic studies have been conducted among the Tiwi, but few, if any, of an historical nature. (See list of works in Appendix A) One thesis has been produced on Tiwi ethnohistory, but this was based on archival and library research only, and did not involve field work in the islands.¹⁴ A long interest in the ethnography and history of the Tiwi encouraged me to undertake this ethnohistorical research which grew from non-academic work with the community between 1960 to 1965 in the early 1970s. The Tiwi taught me about their culture, their past and their genealogies as I gained their confidence. This knowledge led to an interest in the accompanying written material which I eventually combined into a thesis - the basis of this book.

The theme of this work, which covers the timespan from the undefined distant past to 1918, is the uniqueness of the Tiwi Islanders and the relationship of this status to their history of contacts with outside cultures. The Islanders have had a most interesting series of infrequent cross-cultural encounters in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries and, more frequently, into contemporary times. Socially and culturally these people demonstrate aspects of their lifestyle, beliefs and practices which make them stand out as distinct in the Aboriginal and Islander community as a whole. The

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

ethnohistory of the Islanders shows that, while similar incidents took place in other frontier locations, the period over which this occurred in the Tiwi islands, its intermittent pattern, and its repercussions made it unique in Australian indigenous history. The historical resistance of the Tiwi to cultural change, and the resulting low degree of acculturation by 1918 when compared with many mainland tribal groups, further illustrates the Islanders' distinctiveness.

The major difficulty in researching such a history is the comparative lack of primary sources. There is no primary data available to guide the researcher towards solving questions surrounding the origins of the Tiwi people and to the true beginnings of their distinct cultural and spiritual practices. Some primary material does exist in Holland, Indonesia and Portugal but was inaccessible at the time of writing. Apart from two official reports from the 1880s, the only primary evidence of the extent of trade between the Tiwi and Macassan trepangers is in the oral history of elderly Islanders, most of whom are now deceased.¹⁵ Similarly, the factual accounts of raids on several mainland tribes by the Tiwi are restricted to incidents which occurred in the latter half of the nineteenth century and are in the historical record. Thus, as with the subject of visits to the islands by the Macassans, many questions about early encounters must remain unanswered.

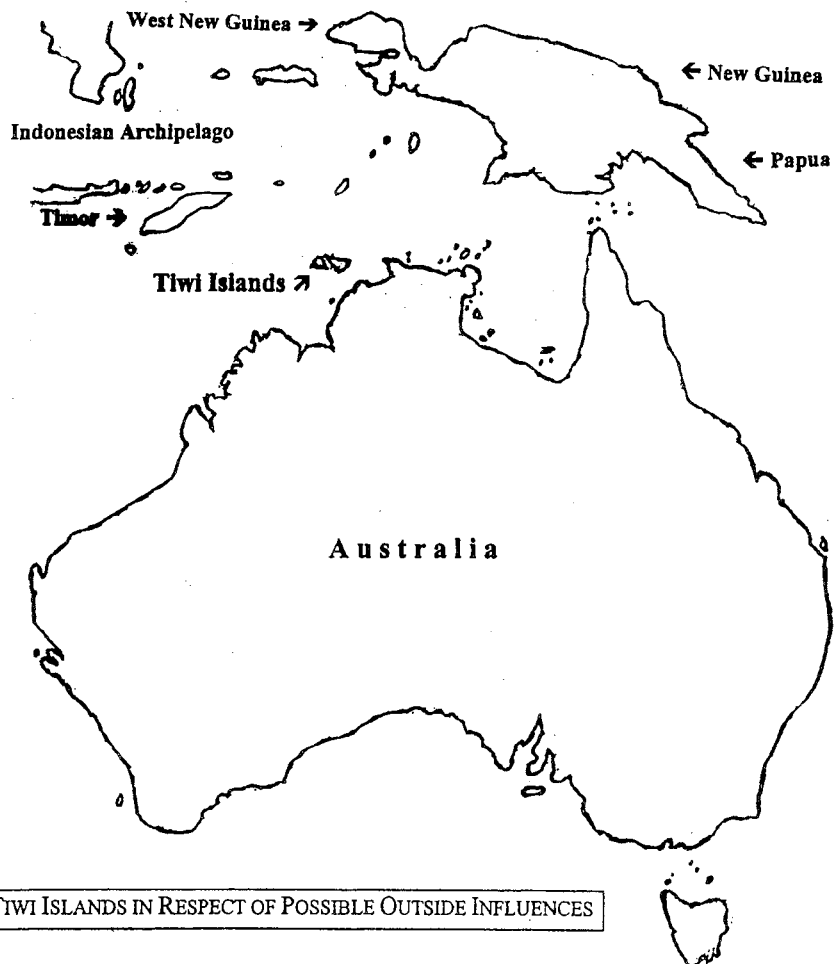
The ethnohistory surrounding the short-lived outpost of Fort Dundas on Melville Island is a more fruitful area of research, in that along with official reports from that settlement in the *Historical Records of Australia*, there also exist a few other relevant documents. Regrettably, much of the material relating to incidents between the Islanders and the garrison is limited, as is the wont of official reports. Similarly, written observations of the Tiwi by British officers are scant in detail. Nearly all of the primary information is European oriented, while even the Tiwi oral history of the Fort Dundas era is restricted in its detail. Where necessary, relevant secondary material has been explored and used if its accuracy can be demonstrated. Where misconceptions and errors have been detected these have been indicated, especially where these have been absorbed into public credence, building up an almost mythical portrait of the Tiwi.

As is to be expected, primary documentation of incidents and events is more readily available where such contacts occurred after the establishment of Palmerston (later Darwin), late in 1869. Data on some aspects of the relationship between the Tiwi and buffalo shooters in the early years of the twentieth century may be sourced in government documents, while some relevant dates can be gleaned from newspapers of the time. Several incidents referred to in archival material can be fleshed out by the oral history of the Tiwi, although it is sometimes not clear about which part of the buffalo shooting epoch the indigenous informants are speaking. Again, interviews with Tiwi elders have enabled erroneous data in published material and public belief to be corrected. Likewise, Tiwi oral history has been important in highlighting several inaccuracies in the public knowledge of the mission era on Bathurst Island. Criticism of indigenous oral history has occurred in the past but a careful consideration of the stories narrated by elderly Islanders can prove their value in interpreting published mainstream material. Archival material contains much information on the founding and the early years of the mission at Nguuu, but even this data has gaps.

Over the years of my sometimes intense, sometimes sporadic, personal contact with the Tiwi, the people themselves have been most cooperative and informative. The significance of Islander perceptions of past incidents cannot be over-emphasized. The

Tiwi see their history from a Tiwi point of view. What is important to Europeans in Tiwi oral stories may not be so to the Islanders. It must be recognised that ethically the indigenous historical knowledge passed to the researcher is seen as the intellectual property of the Tiwi, not the researcher, although it can be used by the historian. Nevertheless, in assessing and evaluating relevant material it has been essential to appreciate the values of each of the cultures involved in the inter-racial encounters and to look at the available evidence in an honest and as unjaundiced a manner as possible.

The actual period of recorded contacts looked at in this project is from 1636 to 1918. Until 1824 inter-cultural encounters were sporadic, involving in the main visitors from South-east Asia or Europe. The one exception was P.P. King, an Australian. Recorded material available on visits by British, Dutch, French, Indonesian, and possibly Chinese and Portuguese voyagers prior to 1818 is somewhat limited. Inter-racial contact was more intensive during the occupation of Fort Dundas. With the establishment of Palmerston Stockade at Escape Cliffs, on the mainland, and then the Fort Point camp (now Darwin) in the 1860s, shipping traffic in the vicinity of the Tiwi Islands increased



MAP 1

LOCATION OF TIWI ISLANDS IN RESPECT OF POSSIBLE OUTSIDE INFLUENCES

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

dramatically. Colonial Australian interest in the islands also developed with the permanent settlement of the Northern Territory by non-Aborigines. By 1895 buffalo shooters had established a semi-permanent presence on Melville Island. The return of these men to the island in 1905 heralded the beginning of an expanded cosmos and a change in history for the Tiwi. Not only did a permanent outside presence replace the earlier intermittent and semi-permanent inter-cultural contacts but, by 1911, a new presence, Catholic missionaries, became the real agents of change in the islands. The Tiwi witnessed several major events during this last period. One was a government investigation into alleged misconduct by buffalo shooters. The other was missionary activity resulting in gradual but potent changes in several major areas of Tiwi culture and lifestyle.

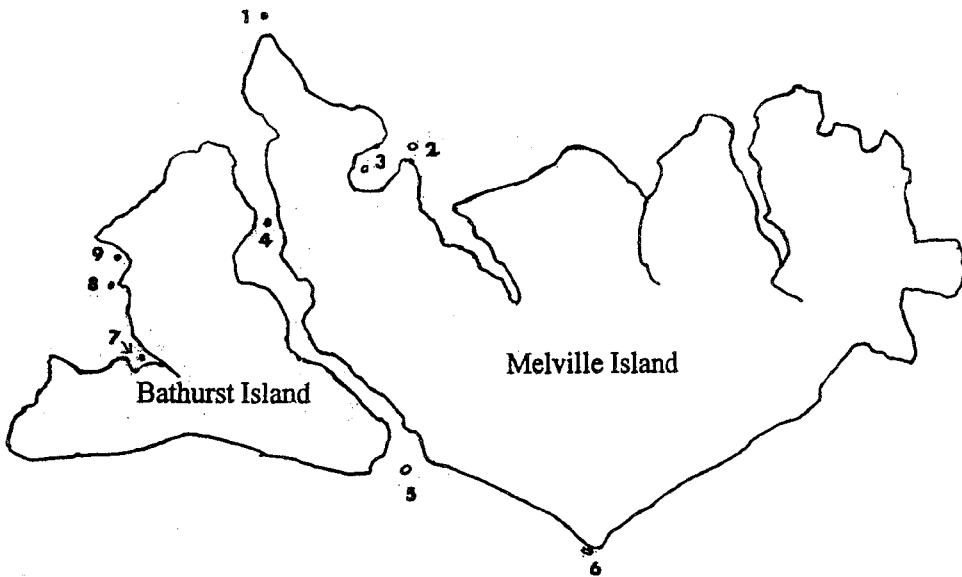
The researching and writing of an indigenous history by a non-Aboriginal or Islander person requires a rationale in the present political climate where such an undertaking is criticised by some Aboriginal people and like-thinking members of mainstream society. In this case the justification is two-fold: firstly, the importance from an academic point of view in recording a study that has previously not been undertaken in this form, and secondly, its significance for the target community. As much of the Aboriginal history researched to date has relied entirely on archival and published material, the thrust of my study has been to supplement such material on the Tiwi with oral material, museum studies of Islander artifacts collected in the first two decades of the twentieth century, and personal observations of Tiwi life, culture and traditional ceremonies which could provide a background to the history under study. At the same time use has had to be made of secondary material to augment gaps in primary sources.

A quantity of geographical, historical and anthropological data on the Tiwi is available after 1818, and is accessible in a range of archival matter, government and mission records, journals and other publications. Nevertheless, gaps do exist in archival material relating to the activities of the buffalo shooters, the Northern Territory administration, and the early years of the Catholic Mission in the Tiwi Islands.¹⁶ Fortunately, a lack of written records on some incidents of inter-cultural relations and collisions has been compensated for by the oral histories and personal memories of elderly Islander informants. Using such verbal information brings certain problems. A lack of dates in oral history means that the information gained needs to be reconciled with known incidents or Tiwi genealogies. Oral histories and personal memories can also bring with them the Tiwi versions of European or Asiatic names, just as Europeans face difficulties in pronouncing indigenous names. The Islanders' stories and verbal data stand up well to cross-checking where this is possible. On several occasions, Tiwi oral history led me to discover that published non-Aboriginal versions of incidents or matters were incorrect, even when these were written by academics or highly acknowledged authors. In oral history and memory, there is always the problem of whether to translate pidgin-English or to just explain the significance of the event. While in the main, many incidents or oral history and memory are referred to in a passing manner in the text of this thesis, several events are set down verbatim as recorded by me to give the reader an understanding of how oral history is recalled by the narrator. Where these were narrated in Tiwi pidgin-English, a brief translation is then given.

Although in the 1960s this knowledge was still strong among the elders genealogical evidence limited it to the period beginning in 1818. As I discovered in 1995, however, the bulk of detailed oral history demonstrated in the Tiwi community in the 1960s has

declined dramatically due to both acculturation but, more particularly, the deaths of many elders. It is noticeable, too, that the Tiwi artistic endeavour of recording historical incidents through the media of bark paintings and wooden carvings, so prominent in the 1960s, was no longer being practised in 1995. Fortunately, basic knowledge of certain historical events is still maintained by a number of Islanders, supported today by locally produced booklets which tell in both Tiwi and English local Creation Period stories and a few events in local ethnohistory. Also, a generalised knowledge of certain incidents in local history is maintained through myth, song and dance, as well as by word of mouth.¹⁷ Myths, at least the more modern ones, must not be discarded immediately as the designs of imagination. Incidents and characters which have reached the status of myth in Tiwi history should not be discarded as “simple stories of the Aborigines” simply because they are not documented by European sources. There is secular reality in such “myths”.

In the course of my research it became evident that a number of errors of varying degrees exist in some aspects of historical accounts about the Tiwi, in works of both an academic and a non-academic nature. Several incidents in the ethnohistory of the Islanders have attracted the attention of writers of popular books or magazine and newspaper articles. Invariably, these writings are erroneous in respect of some of the “facts” portrayed therein, while other points have been sometimes embellished to the extent where the incident written about is fictionalised.¹⁸ In addition to offering romanticised and inaccurate pictures of Tiwi history to the large population of readers



MAP 2

THE LAND OF THE TIWI PEOPLE

KEY TO SMALL ISLANDS	
1. Seagull	6. Irrititu
2. Karlslake	7. Turiturina
3. Nodlaw	8. Matingalia
4. Harris	9. Clift
5. Buchanan	

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

of popular books and articles, these authors have helped to perpetuate errors which are contained in a small number of serious historical works. Inexactitudes are damaging to a more accurate or objective picture of Tiwi society and history which can develop from combining myth, oral history and academic research. Some such misconceptions about Aboriginal people grew out of the period when the European version of Australia's history glorified the pioneer, the explorer, and such exotic figures as pearlers and buffalo shooters, to the detriment of the indigenous society which had suffered at the hands of many of these people. The Islanders possess a real history, which, is a dramatic and intriguing one. The need exists, however, for the historian to look at the situation dispassionately and to present the chosen interpretation from all angles. Every attempt has therefore been made to ensure that the data contained in this book is accurate, and, where appropriate, published and unpublished misinformation will be indicated.

-
- ¹ Beckett, Jeremy, "Aboriginal Histories, Aboriginal Myths: An Introduction". In *Oceania*, Vol. 65, No. 2, December, 1994, p. 97.
 - ² Corris, Peter, *Aborigines and Europeans in Western Victoria*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1968.
 - ³ McBryde, Isabel, "Ethnohistory in an Australian Context: Independent Discipline or Convenient Data Quarry?" In *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1979, p. 128.
 - ⁴ McBryde, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
 - ⁵ Reynolds, Henry, "Aboriginal-European Contact History: Problems and Issues". In *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 3, June, 1978, p. 13. Where quotations are a part of this dissertation they are given verbatim, including spelling variations and a small "a" at the beginning of the words Aborigine or Aboriginal.
 - ⁶ Rumsey, Alan, "The Dreaming, Human Agency and Inscriptive Practice". In *Oceania*, Vol. 65, No. 2, December, 1994, pp. 117-118.
 - ⁷ Rumsey, *op. cit.*, p. 118. Wolfe, Patrick, "On Being Woken Up: The Dreamtime in Anthropology and in Australian Settler Culture". In *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 33, No. 2, April, 1991, pp. 199-201, correctly points out that the term "dreamtime" was introduced by W.B. Spencer and F.J. Gillen and came into popular use through the writings of non-indigenous anthropologists.
 - ⁸ Beckett, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
 - ⁹ For instance, Rose, D. B., *Hidden Histories*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991; Shaw, B. & McDonald, S., "They did it themselves: Reminiscences of seventy years". In *Aboriginal History*, 1978, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 122-139; and my own research with the Tiwi.
 - ¹⁰ Smith, Arthur, "Indigenous Research Ethics: Policy, Protocol and Practice". In *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 1997, p. 23.
 - ¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 27. One example is Liddell, Rodney, *Cape York, The Savage Frontier*, Redbank, Queensland: Rodney Liddell, 1996. Other examples will be cited in the body of this thesis.
 - ¹² McBryde, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
 - ¹³ Howitt, Richard, Crough, Greg and Pritchard, Bill, "Participation, power and social research in Central Australia". In *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1990/No. 1, p. 2.
 - ¹⁴ Krastins, Valda, *The Tiwi. A Cultural Contact History of the Australian Aborigines on Bathurst and Melville Islands 1705-1942*, BA (Hons.) thesis, Australian National University, 1972.

- ¹⁵ For instance, the late Paddy Porkilari, Jerry Kerinaia, Alan Pupajua, Jimmy Illatumi, Bismark Kerinaia, Isadore Fernando, all of whom were interviewed in the 1960s.
- ¹⁵ Some newspaper cuttings and government and mission memoranda do not carry dates or source of origin, for example, while annual mission reports to the government prior to 1923 are no longer on file.
- ¹⁶ The matter of historical dances was confirmed by John Baptist Pupangamirri and Barry Puruntatameri, Nguui, 7/11/1995. Some of these dances were witnessed at various times in the period 1960-1965.
- ¹⁷ For example, "Buffalo hunter became king of Melville Island". In *Daily Mirror*, 2/10/1978, p. 6; Hill, Ernestine, *The Territory*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1991, pp. 44 , 374; Drain, John, "Australia's Buffalo Bill". In *The Territorian*, December, 1967; Hill, Ernestine, "Bos Buffelus". In *Walkabout*, 1/1/1944, p. 9; Robertson , J.C., "Buffalo Hunting in Australia". In *The Lone Hand*, Vol. 5, 1/10/1910, p. 673. Powell, Alan, *Far Country*, 2nd edition, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988, p. 242.

CHAPTER ONE

The Traditional Tiwi - A Unique Society

(Pre-Contact Years)

Bathurst and Melville Islands are situated eleven degrees south of the Equator, at the junction of the Arafura and Timor Seas. The major islands in what are now commonly known as the Tiwi Islands, they are located about 60 kilometres north of Darwin, Australia. At its eastern-most point Melville Island is 22 kilometres across Dundas Strait from the Northern Territory mainland. Bathurst Island covers 2071 square kilometres, while Melville Island, Australia's largest island after Tasmania, has an area of 5697 square kilometres. The two major islands are separated by Apsley Strait (*Pilangimpi*). The Tiwi group also includes the tiny Buchanan (*Yirripurlingayi*), *Irritutu*, Harris (*Pump-ee-o*), Seagull (*Purapundili*), Karlake (*Wulurungku*), Nodlaw and Clift (*Urangku*) Islands. These small islands are uninhabited but are of cultural or economic value to the Tiwi, as the island people are now known. The neighbouring Vernon Islands (*Potinga*), in Clarence Strait and to the south-west of Melville Island, are also of cultural, historical and economic importance to the Tiwi.¹ The Vernons, it is claimed by Tiwi people, broke away from Mandiupi, in south-eastern Melville Island, as the result of an earthquake in the distant past. During the last Ice Age all of the Tiwi Islands were part of the Sahul Shelf in Greater Australia. The islands were separated from the Australian mainland between 8,000 and 10,000 years ago. There were no specific names for the seas around the islands, these being known simply as *winga* or *mirripaka*, which mean sea, sea water or saltwater. Under the terms of the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, inalienable title to the Tiwi Islands was granted to the Islanders in 1980 and, due to an error in that declaration, it was legislated again in 1987. A claim to the Vernons was lodged by the Tiwi in 1995.

The pre-contact population of the Tiwi Islands is difficult to estimate. Even in the twentieth century, it was difficult to gain a reasonably accurate figure for many decades. The movement of people on social and political travels across the islands, in addition to visits to the mainland, especially from 1915, as well as a tendency by some Islanders to remain largely in their own remote "countries" until at least World War Two made head counts difficult. About 1941, Patrol Officer Bill Harney, of the Native Affairs Branch, met a large group of Tiwi participating in a ritual at Panarli (Cape Gambier), Melville Island. At the time he was carrying out a canoe patrol of 100 kilometres to study the "drift lines" of the Tiwi to the mainland.² After World War Two all of the people of the Mandiupi, one of the Tiwi bands, came into the mission at Nguuiu, but a small number returned to the bush. How many did so, and remained there, is uncertain. By 1954

some researchers thought that there were less than 10 Tiwi living in permanent isolation in the islands.³ Assessments of the population swung wildly with figures for Melville Island ranging from 300 to 400 in 1897, to over 1000 in 1907, and to a semi-official suggestion of 400 in 1908.⁴ Basedow estimated a population of about 500 residents on Bathurst Island in 1913, while Hart stated that there were 1062 people on both islands in 1928-1930.⁵ According to a 1996 report, 3000 Tiwi people occupied the islands in 1995.⁶ Lee claimed a population of 1500 to 1600 in the early 1980s, while Goodale gave a figure of approximately 2000 Tiwi residing in the islands in 1986/87.⁷ A population of 1500 to 2000 would appear to be a reasonable estimate for the pre-contact period, and would support the later estimates.

For many years the occupants of each of the main islands were considered to be separate tribes. In fact, they form one cultural and political group. The close proximity of the eastern most point of Melville Island to the mainland could lead non-Aborigines to erroneously conclude that regular contact, and exchange of trade and culture, took place between the Islanders and the nearest mainland tribes such as the Iwaidja, Larrakia and Djerimanga (Woolner).⁸ Instead the evidence available indicates that apart from occasional journeys to the mainland, possibly only in the nineteenth century, the Tiwi remained in isolation from other Aborigines, allowing the Islanders to develop as a distinctive people.⁹ It is my contention that the Tiwi people are unique among Australia's indigenous peoples. This assertion is based on various social, physical, cultural, linguistic, religious and historical apexes of Islander society which stand out as peculiar to that society. There are other points to be drawn into this argument, such as the perceived superiority of the Tiwi, their resistance to acculturation, their long, if intermittent, resistance to outside forces, and their eventual acceptance of historical inter-cultural contacts, some of which were a threat or prejudicial to their well-being. In fact, the Tiwi see themselves as being different to the indigenous people of the mainland. Since 1906 the Islanders have attracted various anthropologists and linguists to their shores to explore these differences, in particular Spencer, Hart, Mountford, Pilling, Goodale, Osborne and Lee. The work of these and other researchers and observers will be called upon to support, qualify and extend my own observations.

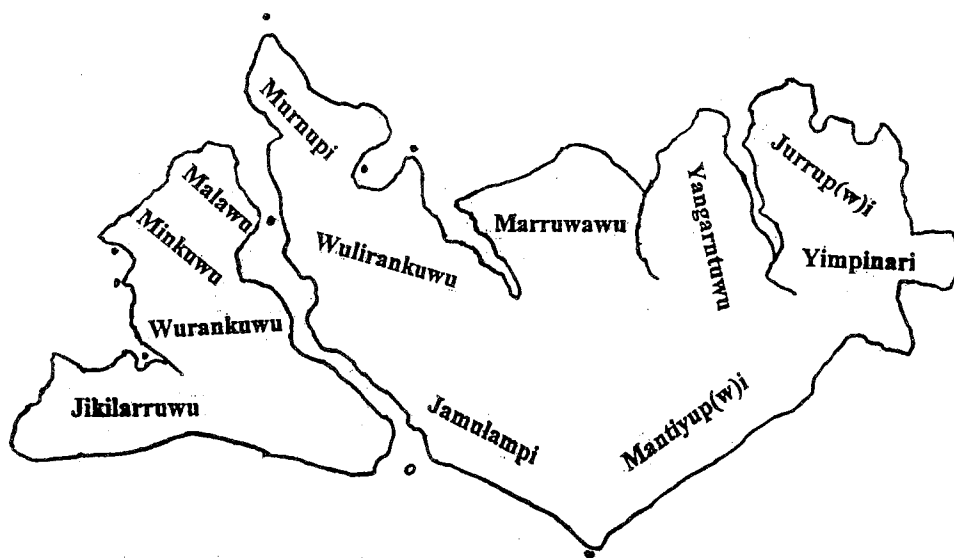
In the traditional Tiwi cosmos the islands formed the whole world of the Islander people. Here is an important difference between the Islanders and other indigenous Australian groups. The Tiwi saw no need to apply indigenous names to Bathurst and Melville Islands individually or jointly. Instead, they were content to apply names to the various "countries" (*murrakupupuni*) or political and geographical divisions of the islands. *Murrakupupuni* also means "the whole world", which, considering the Tiwi concept of their world, would also relate to the Islanders' cosmos. These political divisions were, and still are, the customary territories or homes of the various hordes or bands which together make up the corporate body known as the Tiwi, that is, they unite to form one overall body.¹⁰ However, until this century the people did not openly demonstrate that political unity although they shared a common language and a common culture. As a result, prior to the mission era which began in 1911, the Tiwi did not act as a *corporate* unit against intruders.¹¹ This view is supported by reports of the relatively small number of Tiwi who attacked visitors from the outside world. In comparison, elsewhere in Australia there are recorded instances in which tribal groups mustered large numbers of their men for engagements in the frontier conflict. As recently as the late 1920s large

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

groups of mainland Aborigines attacked police patrols in Eastern Arnhem Land and to the south of Darwin. The Tiwi practice of clinging to their respective bands would not encourage the bringing together of such large numbers of fighting men.

Although membership of a band could be fluid, with Islanders having the right and ability to change associations, a Tiwi had strong and solid links with his or her particular stretch of territory or country to which affiliation was usually held through patrilineal descent.¹² Thus, in a traditional sense and in their own land, Islanders identified themselves by giving the name of their respective bands (hordes) or of their respective countries, rather than offering primary identification as a member of the Tiwi tribal group. This lack of employment of a tribal name as a common umbrella was, as far as I can ascertain, unknown elsewhere in Australia. The Gunditjmarra of Victoria's Western District, for instance, were and are proud of their unifying name, as were, and are, the Murinbata people of the Port Keats region of the Northern Territory.¹³ In contrast, the Islanders' practice of not using an overall group name continued into contact times.

However, once movement to the mainland began following the arrival of buffalo shooters on Melville Island in the 1890s, the Islanders identified themselves to other indigenous people as Tiwi, meaning "we, the only people", not just "people".¹⁴ They saw themselves as a chosen people, the only human beings in the world, "...as if other human beings are/(were)outside their frame of reference, or world view" or "the chosen people who live on and own the islands as distinct from any other alleged human beings who might show up from time to time on the beaches."¹⁵ Osborne argued that, the Islanders used the term *Tiwi*, to distinguish themselves from animals, the only other beings they originally knew.¹⁶ To non-Aborigines they became known simply as Melville

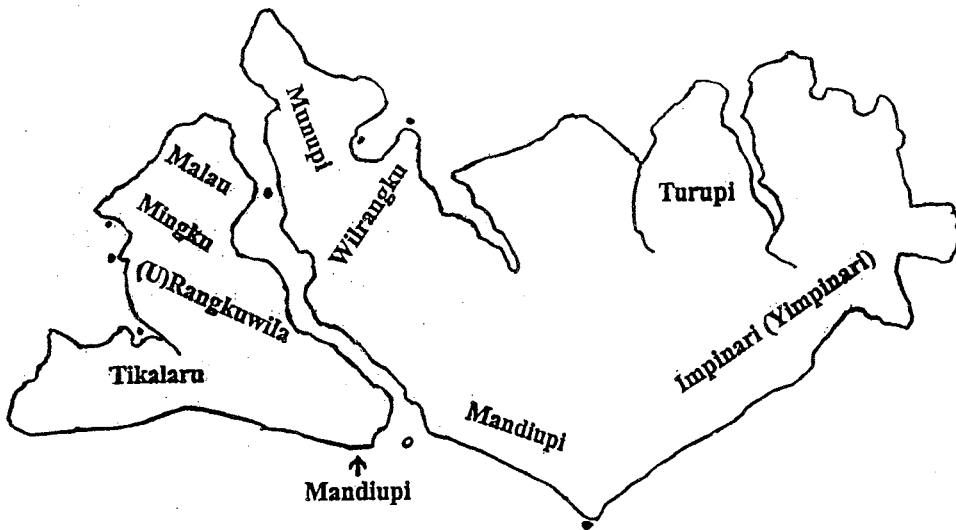


MAP 3

THE TIWI BANDS OR POLITICAL SUB-DIVISIONS
(according to Babui and Ward, although several of the names given by them vary slightly. The spellings given here vary from those in anthropological and wider use. See Chapter One.)

Islanders or Bathurst Islanders, terms that were popularly used well into the 1960s. As for their homeland, the nearest to a vernacular name the Tiwi have for Bathurst and Melville Islands is “*Ratuati Irara*”, which means “two islands”.

The long period of isolation led to the evolving of a social structure which is, in a number of ways, different to those of other tribal groupings. In contrast with mainland groups, the Tiwi community lacks moiety and section structures. Their kinship system is uniquely developed, certain aspects of it not conforming with the mainland patterns. They introduced terms into their system to overcome potential confusion caused by their marriage system.¹⁷ While Aboriginal groups traditionally maintained a strict marriage system operating within an inflexible kinship structure, Tiwi rules varied. Islander law required that all females must be married, no matter their age, physical condition, and attitude to marriage, a requirement not existing in mainland tribes.¹⁸ As a result, there was a higher proportion of plural marriages among the Islanders than on the mainland.¹⁹ In addition, the Tiwi were the only Australian indigenous people to allow marriage between half-brothers and half-sisters. This practice was still evident as recently as the 1960s. The Tiwi marriage arrangement was such that in their polygamous society some men were able to build up their prestige and standing by obtaining a larger number of wives than was possible on the mainland. Hart records three elders who late in the nineteenth century had 29, 25 and 22 wives respectively, while in the 1930s, there were a number of men with 10 to 12 spouses each.²⁰ In the 1960s, a man on Bathurst Island was known to have had at least 15 wives, although some were by then deceased.



MAP 4

THE TIWI BANDS OR POLITICAL SUB-DIVISIONS
(as in anthropological and wider use.)

Note:
The sub-divisions as shown on this map were recorded by Hart in 1928-29, and have been also used by later anthropologists and linguists with occasional slight variations.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Over the years changes have appeared in the Islanders' totemic or Yiminga clans system, which is matrilineal. Nevertheless, this system, in which totems symbolise the spiritual relationship of clan members to each other and to their ancestors, is an important feature of the Tiwi social and cultural structure. Another important establishment has been their organisation of bands and countries. Today, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, variations occur in published details of the local bands and the respective countries of Tiwi society. It is possible that several of the units listed by some researchers are sub-groups of bigger bands or, as Goodale calls them, subcountries.²¹ On the other hand, Hart points out that there are "a multiplicity of names" for each of the bands and territories, and as a result there is confusion and doubt about the number of political divisions in the island community.²² Hart's argument is illustrated by a variety of alternate names for each of the nine hordes and "countries" set out in Figure 2. For example, among the alternatives for the Mandiimbula (Mantiympila) band is Tumulambila (Jamulampila in Figure 1), while Marawauila (Marruwawula in Figure 1), according to Hart, is another name for the Wilrangkuwila (Wilirankuwila) people. One Tiwi informant, Topsy Piantiringilla, claimed that Marawauila is also known as Paluwiyunga, that "country" being occupied by the Paluwiyungapula band. The respective findings of Spencer, Pilling, Osborne and Ward likewise demonstrate the dilemma in clearly identifying this aspect of the Tiwi social and political structure.²³ Despite differing with Hart about the number of bands, Osborne subscribes to the theory of alternative names for these groups.²⁴ Feuds over stolen women and other matters were a feature of Tiwi life, gradually reducing in number sometime after the establishment of the Catholic Mission at Nguiu in 1911, although occasionally open fights occurred until the 1950s. In such feuds the opposing groups were usually drawn from various totemic clan members from within contending bands rather than from each involved band as a whole.

The presence of bands may divide the Tiwi politically but there is no division in the people's belief in the manner in which their islands were created in the Palingarri, "the time long ago" or "long ago (in the past)". The Palingarri or Creation Time is the Tiwi equivalent of the European initiated and inaccurate term "Dreamtime". In the context of island culture Palingarri is the beginning of Tiwi history. In contrast to most of indigenous Australia, various language groups in Arnhem Land believe that their specific principal Creator Beings were females. Similarly, the Tiwi hold that their islands were created by a woman, in this case an old, blind lady named Murtankala (also spelt by various researchers as Murdankala, Mudangkla and Mudungkala). Briefly, in the distant past the land was covered in darkness and contained no geographical features, animals or humans. Below the earth there lived some spirit people, including Murtankala and her three children. One day she dug her way up to the land's surface. As she crawled about searching for food for herself and her infant children she gradually carved out the outlines of the Tiwi Islands. During her arduous journey she carried the children in a bark basket or *tunga*. Water flowed in behind Murtankala to surround the islands. The Creator Being began and ended her slow journey at Murupianga, on what is now the coast of Yimpinari (Impinari). Here she placed her children on the beach. With a bark torch she lit up the world, making day and night. Before disappearing forever, Murtankala clothed the islands with vegetation and introduced animal life to provide food for her children, Purrukuparli (Purukuparli) and his sisters Wurupurungala and Murupiyankala, the ancestors of the Tiwi.²⁵ In his last hours on Melville Island, Purrukuparli performed the first Pukumani mortuary ritual near Cape Keith (*Eeparli*),

Tiwi Social Organisation - Political Sub-Divisions

	Band	Country
1.	Malawila	Malawu
2.	Minkuwila	Minkuwu
3.	Wurankuwila	Wuranku
4.	Jukilawila	Jikilarruwu
5.	Mantiyimpila	Mantiyupwi
6.	Yayimpi	Yimpinari
7.	Jamulampila	Jamulampi
8.	(not listed)	Arankitarri
9.	Murnupula	Murnupi
10.	Wulirankuwila	Wulirankuwu
11.	Marruwawula	Marruwawu
12.	(not listed)	Jurruupwi
13.	(not listed)	Yangarntuwu
14.	Kujatampila	Kujatampi

Fig. 1 *The political sub-divisions of the Tiwi Islands as listed by Esther Babui, a Tiwi teacher. (from Esther Babui, History of Bathurst Island People, p. 1)*

	Band	Country
1.	Malauila	Malau
2.	Mingwila	Mingku
3.	Rangkuwila (Urangkuwila)	Rangkuwila (Urangkuwila)
4.	Tikalauila	Tikalaru
5.	Mandiimbula	Mandiupi
6.	Yeimpi	Impanari
7.	Munupula	Munupi
8.	Wilrangkuwila	Wilrangku
9.	Turupula	Turupi

Fig. 2 *The political sub-divisions of the Tiwi Islands as in popular use among anthropologists, missionaries, public servants, etc.*

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

declaring that thereafter all Tiwi were duty bound to carry out this ritual whenever an Islander passed away.²⁶ They were also required to avoid the earthly home of Ampiji, the Rainbow Serpent, who threatened trespassers with death. Given the lack of written records, and the distance in time, the early history of the Tiwi is complicated and unclear. We do know that the Islanders developed into a people distinct both culturally and, to some degree, physically from mainland Aborigines. Whether the Tiwi were always culturally different to other Aboriginal people is now virtually impossible to ascertain. Oral history and genealogies indicate the presence of some mainland ancestry in the community, while Malay or Indonesian features were evident in several of the Tiwi in the 1960s. The physical uniqueness of the Tiwi is commented on by various authors, although their theories of genetic mixing with outside people have yet to be proved.

Early writers were often intent upon classifying and ranking tribes and groups of people and much of their research centred on these categorisations. Researchers today focus on difference, rather than rank, but all researchers commented on the distinctiveness of the Tiwi people. As early as 1853, George Windsor Earl held the view that "...it is certain that the native tribes of the neighbouring coast of Australia look upon the Melville islanders (sic) as belonging to another race..."²⁷ The Tiwi, he stated, were like the people of the south-west of New Guinea rather than "the more gentle savages of the adjacent continent of Australia".²⁸ Docker suggests that the "Tewi" are distinctively of Aboriginal stock, but with a greater admixture of Malay and Papuan blood than that on the northern coast of the mainland.²⁹ This theory is partly supported by Hill with her comment that the Tiwi are "...splendid physical specimens, and far above the mainlander in mentality, probably because of their tincture of Malay blood..."³⁰ Following his visit to Nguiu in the late 1930s, Clune wrote of the racial difference between the Tiwi and the mainland Aborigines, due to "their mixture of Malay and Koepanger blood."³¹ On the other hand, following their survey of indigenous Australians in the 1930s, Norman Tindale and Joseph Birdsell claimed that there were "attenuated traces of Negrito" among some Australian groups, including the Tiwi of Melville Island.³² Although Birdsell's theory of three waves of different racial stocks migrating into Australia, from which this claim came, is no longer accepted in anthropology, he did recognise the physical differences.

Coon saw Tiwi society as "undeniably archaic", both physically and culturally.³³ In contrast, Major John Campbell, a commandant of Fort Dundas on Melville island in the 1820s, described the Tiwi as "...more athletic, active, and enterprising than those" he had seen in New South Wales.³⁴ Generally, male Islanders have been considered to be taller and sturdier than their mainland counterparts although physically of Australoid stock.³⁵ While one study of North Australian Aborigines in the 1930s found Tiwi men to have the greatest shoulder breadth and trunk length and the lightest eyes of indigenous groups, it did not record them as having being the tallest.³⁶ The Islanders are acknowledged to be the darkest of all Australians, while, even in recent years, the men's clipped beards fringing from ear to ear were unknown elsewhere in indigenous Australia.

There is no doubting the athleticism of the Tiwi. Both Hart and Spencer asserted that physically and intellectually they were superior over the mainland groups. Flynn agrees with this opinion, seeing the Islanders as the most intelligent of the Aborigines he had

The Tiwi Totemic System Prior to 1945

Sub-Division (Phratry) 1

Clan Name (Tiwi)	Clan Name (English)
Mantuupwawi	Fly
Melupuwila or Mirripuwila (Milirripuwila)	White Cockatoo
Miyartiwi (Miartuwi)	Pandanus
Takaringuwi or Arewurtuwi	Mullet
Tarnikuwi or Muranjepila	Flying Fox
Timelawi or Wulinjuwila (Wilintuwila)	Mosquito
Tjilaruwi	Jabiru
Wutunjuwi, Mutanjepila or Yirrikipayiwi	Crocodile

SUB-DIVISION (PHRATRY) 2

CLAN NAME (TIWI)	CLAN NAME (ENGLISH)
Antuluwi (Angiluwi)	Fresh Water/Rain
Yarinapila (Jarinapila) or Keretuwi	Red Ochre
Jilituwi	Wild Orange
Parulianjepila	Mud
Temerarinjuwi or Arikitoruwi (Arikutoriwi)	Woollybutt
Wurantawi or Punkwarinyuwi (Punjkwarinuwi)	Stingray

SUB-DIVISION (PHRATRY) 3

CLAN NAME (TIWI)	CLAN NAME (ENGLISH)
Arinkuwila, Larrula or Purtupula	Stone
Pungaluwila (Punjaliwila) or Patuapuruwila	Oyster/Stone
Taparuwi or Murantuwi	Moon
Japijapiwi (Tapitapuwi) or Kutatampila	March Fly
Tokwampuwi or Murupianjipila	Yellow Honey Eater
Walikuwila, Kutaluwi or Yikwani	Fire/Stars
Warninjkituwi or Kuwurrawi	Fish

Fig. 3 Sources: Osborne, 1974, p. 167; Goodale, 1974, p. 20-21; Hamey and Elkin, 1943, p. 229; Hart, 1930, pp. 177-178

met in the Northern Territory.³⁷ Although critical of the lifestyle of the Tiwi as he perceived it, Henry Ennis, who was at Fort Dundas in its early days, held that there were “shades of difference” between the habits of the Islanders and those of New South Wales Aborigines. The Tiwi, Ennis considered, were “superior in person”, and, having

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

seen island women wearing “mats” of plaited grass, he voiced his contention that the Islanders did not “...occupy so low a place on the graduated scale of the human species...” as the indigenous people of New South Wales.³⁸ This view was echoed by Captain J. G. Bremer, who was responsible for establishing the new settlement. Having observed two Tiwi women wearing such “mats”, Bremer concluded that “...if covering of women is general, it is a mark of decency and a step towards Civilization perfectly unknown to the inhabitants of the East Coast.”³⁹ Tiwi women more commonly used a bark covering when men were present, leading early writers to praise such modesty.⁴⁰ Most failed to observe that in the areas of art and religion at least, the social status of Tiwi women “is on a much higher plane than that of any other aboriginal women, but that was a common misconception at the time.”⁴¹

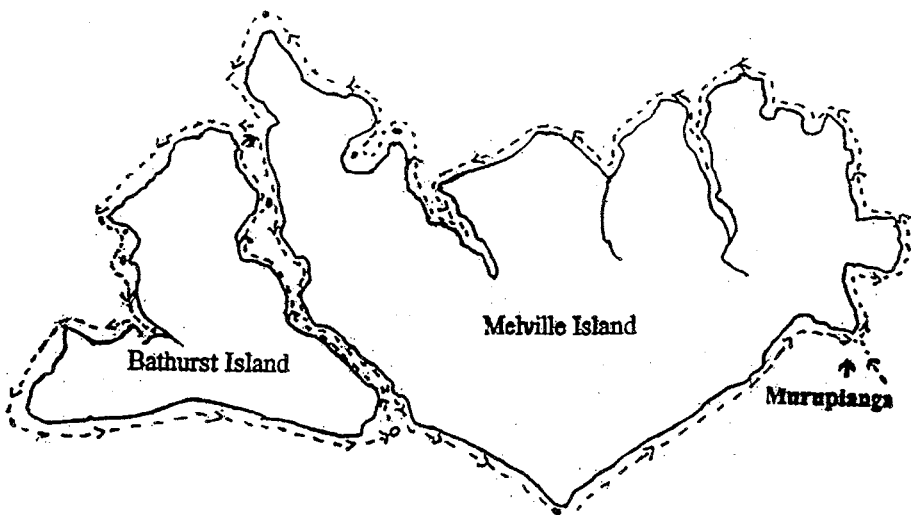
The uniqueness of the Islanders is most clearly evident in their culture. Their distinctiveness possibly developed through 5000 years of isolation from mainland influences following the rising of the seas. Although the distant mainland (*temanamini*) could be dimly seen by the Tiwi standing on the shores of Melville Island, it was considered by some Tiwi, at least, to be *Tibambinum* or *Tibambinumi*, the land of the dead.⁴² It was, and is, known also, as *Tiliarti*.⁴³ There is no indication as to when visits to the mainland began but, these could have commenced as late as the nineteenth century. Even then such knowledge would have been basic until a long-term relationship was formed with the Iwaidja people of the Cobourg Peninsula towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Tiwi material culture was not characteristically Aboriginal, bearing little resemblance to the other cultures of indigenous Australia. Whether the artifacts of the Tiwi evolved entirely through isolation or through influences from other indigenous peoples outside of Australia cannot now be clarified. Islanders lacked the spear-thrower, boomerang, woven dilly bag and didgeridoo (didjeridu) of various neighbouring mainland groups, and the shield of tribes further a field.⁴⁴ It is very possible that message sticks (*poringitti*) were not traditional to the islands, but were introduced by contact with the mainland Iwaidja around the turn of the century. While the cultural singularity of the Islanders, encompasses all aspects of their lives it stands out especially in their material culture and their art.⁴⁵ Exclusive to their material culture were large, heavy barbed wooden spears (*arawinikiri*) developed to “...a complexity of design and a degree of decoration unknown on the mainland” and a variety of pointed, rounded and forked throwing sticks (*kirlimurrupunga*, *murrukuwunga*, *mujururruka*, *kunjanga*, *tauputeraringa*, etc.) unique to their islands.⁴⁶ The death of the last man to be killed with throwing stick (*kirlimurrupunga*) at Nguiu on 27 October 1949, led to the Tiwi banning this type of weapon in fights.⁴⁷

The technical ability of Islander craftsmen is seen, too, in the “turtini” or carved and painted grave posts which are unknown elsewhere in Australia. While Hoff claimed that the posts, placed around a grave, symbolised human figures, imprisoning the spirit of the deceased person in the grave, Hart saw them as a kind of altar.⁴⁸ Post carving is, in the view of House, the Islanders’ “most important field of visual creativity.”⁴⁹ As Osborne states “Tiwi art, too, (as on the elaborately painted and carved ceremonial grave-posts) is very unlike that of the mainland, being more conventionalised and indeed almost non-representational.”⁵⁰ It is believed that the distinctly Tiwi form of carved wooden figures, some Janus faced or double-headed, grew out of the sculpting of the large poles.

Islander culture stands alone in its art designs. The Tiwi artistic system is different to those in Arnhem Land and Central Australia. "Tiwi art", it is claimed, "can not be subsumed within mainland Aboriginal art: it is separate and distinct as the Tiwi have always considered themselves to be."⁵¹ Unlike other indigenous groups Islander artists do not reproduce inherited designs and are not restricted to painting totemic patterns. Nor are they bound by group and religious restrictions as to what they can paint or by laws relating to the use of colours as in north-eastern Arnhem Land. As Spencer discovered, the artistic endeavours were also not customarily similar to that of the mainland groups in that island paintings were not related to the Creation Period to the degree of the work of, say, Arnhem Land artists. Tiwi artists, while innovative and individual in their work, traditionally concentrated on producing abstract designs, whether decorating grave poles, their elaborate *tunga* (*wonga-tunga*) large bark baskets, spears and other artifacts, or painting on bark. If early observers are correct, Tiwi bark art originated on the interior of bark shelters. The Tiwi have names for different types of bark paintings, for instance *Irinkirripta* is a painting presenting a "sorrow" subject, that is relating to death. *Munteeklu-u-kuri* is a painting featuring round objects, such as turtle eggs, as its topic.

The distinctiveness of Tiwi art extended to a range of ceremonial headdresses (*pamajini*, *pawuraji*), armbands and legbands (*tukuti*, *yairringa*), neckbands (*marinkwani*), goosefeather pendants (*takwajinga*) and false beards (*yimpunga*).



MAP 5

THE CREATIVE TRAVELS OF MUDUNGKALA (MURTANKALA)

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

The design and style of these and a number of other ceremonial accessories and accoutrements were also restricted to the islands. The ceremonial armlets, commented Spencer,

*...are very picturesque, and, in design quite unlike anything else that I have seen amongst Australian natives; in fact they are more suggestive of the more elaborate designs of the New Guinea and Island tribes.*⁵²

In their isolation the Tiwi expanded their artistic expression to include the “most highly developed” and unique form of body scarring in Aboriginal society and intricate facial and body painting of a type not practised elsewhere.⁵³ While some observers considered the V and inverted V shaped cicatrices to represent the heads of the wide, multi-barbed spears of the Tiwi, others argued that these were the pattern of a zamia palm leaf. The designs of fine lines and dots on face and body were, and are, printed with wooden combs used only in the islands. This painting was considered by Mountford to be “...the most colourful and elaborate of those used by any Australian Aboriginal tribe.”⁵⁴ Klaatsch went further, suggesting a similarity with facial decorations in Hula, New Guinea.⁵⁵

The cultural singularity of the Tiwi is also evident in other, non-material aspects of their lives, as it was in traditional times. Major Campbell, a commandant at Fort Dundas in the 1820s, found the Islanders’ language to be different from those on the mainland, while a New South Wales Aborigine who was briefly at the fort could not communicate with the Tiwi, not being able to “understand a word they uttered.”⁵⁶ This is not uncommon as many Aboriginal languages are completely distinct, but it becomes more significant when considered together with the range of other cultural differences. Osborne claims that the Tiwi language differs very considerably from the languages of neighbouring tribes, there being an almost total dissimilarity on the lexical level. In the view of other linguists, the island language is not related in any way to other indigenous Australian languages.⁵⁷ Nor is there an avoidance language, as in Western Arnhem Land, nor taboo words such as in the Western Desert.⁵⁸ Islander singing and dancing, to the accompaniment of slapping on thighs and buttocks, was likewise very dissimilar to that of other Australian groups. The Tiwi did not possess the didgeridoo (didjeridu), wooden drums, gongs, scraping instruments or stretched possum skins (for thumping), as were traditional on the mainland.

In the consciousness of the Tiwi the independent development of their culture was traditionally seen as reflecting “...the world as they knew it - the lands, shoals, reefs, sand bars and the sea to the distant horizon.”⁵⁹ In a world bounded by the geographical features of the surrounding seas the Tiwi saw themselves as the chosen people, established in their island home by Murtangkala with the assistance of the other spirit people of the *Palingarri*. Out of this period, too, came the totemic clans of the Tiwi, together with their spiritual beliefs and ritual. It is in these religious activities that the uniqueness of the Tiwi is most noticeable. Unlike Aboriginal practices elsewhere, secrecy and the separation of genders in ceremonial activities did not evolve as part of Tiwi spirituality or religion, terms, which in the current discussion about these words in relation to indigenous culture, are used here with caution.⁶⁰ Cult ceremonies and other ritual related to spirit beings and love magic were not practised by the Tiwi as they were in the wider Aboriginal and Islander society. Instead, the Islanders performed four ceremonies which were open to the general public. These were the *Miringilaja*, initiation, the *Kurlama* (*Kulama*), and the *Pukumani* (*Pukamunni*). None of these rites

were performed on prescribed ceremonial grounds, such grounds not being featured in Tiwi spirituality as they were in the beliefs of other Aboriginal and Islander groups.

Apart from the *Mirringilaja*, which was a ceremony for girls who reached the age of puberty, the other rites were the provenance of the Tiwi. The initiation process and ritual of the Islanders, for instance, did not reflect the various rites of passage performed elsewhere in indigenous Australia. Now no longer practised, initiation for both youths and girls was complex and extremely long in duration, about six years for girls and ten years for boys. While there were separate names for each stage or grade of the process, there was no overall name for the whole ritual of transformation. Even though increase ceremonies occurred across Australia, the Islanders version, the *Kurlama* (*Kulama*), was peculiar to the Tiwi. Its uniqueness to the islands was due to its unusual features, these being that (a) it revolved around a poisonous (“cheeky”) species of yam, which had to be leached of its toxins; (b) it incorporated part of the initiation process for males and females; and (c) it involved the public airing of grievances.⁶¹ The most elaborate and spectacular of the Tiwi ceremonies was the *Pukumani* (*Pukamunni*). A prolonged and colourful series of mortuary rites for a member of the Tiwi community, this occurred over many months, requiring various taboos to be observed. The most important religious activity devised by the Tiwi, it was not performed by any other tribal grouping. Involved in the mourning process was the carving and painting of the *turtuni* or grave poles and the making of decorated *tunga* (*wonga-tungu*) or bark baskets mentioned earlier.⁶² When he established his mission at Nguiu, Father Gsell took an ethnocentric view of the *Pukumani*, describing the funeral rite as a “terrifying spectacle” with each mourner behaving “like a maniac”.⁶³ In truth, the *Pukumani* was an impressive and well organised ritual, especially where the deceased was a “big man”. It has no equal elsewhere in Aboriginal mortuary practices and several of these rituals are still performed.

The only physical operation carried out as part of Tiwi ritual was facial and pubic hair depilation. Circumcision, sub-incision and tooth evulsion which featured in the ceremonies of many mainland tribes were not part of the spiritual activities of the Islanders.⁶⁴ Bullroarers, religious boards and stones played no part in Tiwi religion, while themes for women’s grief songs were not correlated with the traditional cosmos as occurred in North-East Arnhem Land.⁶⁵ Tiwi women were able to incorporate day-to-day events and personal experiences into their songs, some of which were erotic in nature, a different circumstance to that in Arnhem Land.⁶⁶ The Tiwi were not blood-drinkers or cannibals, as was once suggested by Willey and Beatty, a colourful but inaccurate comment often repeated.⁶⁷

As far as we know, sorcery was not part of the Tiwi psyche in the pre-contact period.⁶⁸ Nor did their culture encompass such mainland customs as execution by singing, magic art or the “pointing of the bone”. Hart suggests that while the Tiwi may have “believed that magical acts were possible”, they “lacked any knowledge of how to perform them.”⁶⁹ Living in isolation, it is proposed, the Tiwi had no neighbouring tribes who could perform suspicious and mysterious actions against them as occurred between mainland groups. Thus reassured, they had no need to develop any form of magic. Non-academic writings have extended the suggestion of magical acts to witchcraft. Despite Beatty and Gsell writing of witch doctors on Bathurst Island, the Tiwi state had no such practitioners. The term “witch doctor” came into the islands with Europeans. Neither did the ranks of the Tiwi contain “medicine men”.⁷⁰ This is borne out by a piece

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

of oral history which tells the story of Wuninkadoo, a Mandiimbula woman who was captured and taken to the mainland by a Larrakia raiding party in the latter part of the nineteenth century. She had a son, Matchalimpa (Madjalimpa) who became “*medicine man number one. Kill'em blackfellow, other country. Fix'em blackfellow, countryman....Night time he play; spirits he go gettem. Tiwi have no witchdoctors.*”⁷¹ Matchalimpa (Madjalimpa), according to Tiwi history, became a top medicine man in the Larrakia tribe. He had the ability to cause the deaths of men of other tribes and to cure people in his own group of illness. At night he communicated with the spirits. The Tiwi, the narrative continues, do not have medicine men or sorcerers, even after mainland contacts brought differing cultural forms into their territory.

One cause of death in which the Tiwi came to believe is “poison” (*mapurtiti*), a belief which grew out of contact with the Cooper's Iwaidja and other mainland people in the recent contact era. By 1930, the Tiwi fully accepted the concept of people being killed by “poisoning”.⁷² In the 1960s, a strong conviction still existed that anybody who was not young or elderly could not die naturally. In at least one case, during this period, the blame for the death of a man ill in hospital was placed on a non-Tiwi nurse. At the same time, the Tiwi retained strong suspicion of several mainland tribes from whom they tended to remain aloof. The death of one Tiwi man in Darwin “by poisoning” was attributed to a man from a distant tribe who was in Darwin at the time. The alleged poisoner received a severe beating from Tiwi men sent to the mainland to punish him.

The distinctiveness of the Tiwi was traditionally evident in a more awesome aspect of their culture. Infanticide and the abandoning of sick and aged persons was practised by various mainland groups. The Tiwi carried out a real, if gruesome, practice which was confined to their Islands. This was the live burial of weak elderly people, misshapen babies, and one baby of a set of twins.⁷³ These practices did not cease until the late 1940s. Customarily, deceased Tiwi were wrapped in paperbark for burial. When released from this earth at the conclusion of the *Pukumani*, the spirits of the deceased left the islands and walked out to sea to the spirit world through one of three “doors”, *Yugunti*, near Soldier Point on Melville Island, and *Wolamatara* (Rocky Point) and *Jikilarruwu* (Cape Fourcroy), both on Bathurst Island⁷⁴.

The island society, which possibly looked to the north and the north-west for at least some of its customary cultural and early historical links, felt its uniqueness even in the economic and family components of its structure. There is no written record or Islander oral history of trade with other indigenous Australian groups. In the economic area the division of labour for the provision of food was not clearly defined between the sexes as it was in other Aboriginal communities. At the same time, men sought to build up the number of women in their family units to ensure a large and adequate supply of food for their households, as well as earning the title of “a big man” for providing food for large parties and ceremonial or political gatherings.⁷⁵ Although the Tiwi did not have access to large animals such as kangaroos, emus, wombats and cassowaries, as were regionally available to mainland Aborigines, they did have a plentiful supply of traditional foods, as set out in Figure 4.

In its isolation from mainland Australia the island community lacked certain aspects of the material and non-material culture of other indigenous peoples of Australia. Nevertheless, its dramatic development in the fields of artistic and spiritual endeavours demonstrate how different it was traditionally to the ‘archaic’ label. At the same time, the isolation, physical stature, weapons and facial decorations of the Tiwi probably

contributed to the reputation of ferocity the Islanders earned as the outside world gradually came to their shores.

The Food Economy of the Tiwi People

The Tiwi had access to a variety of bush and marine foods, on a seasonal basis, including:

Marine Foods

Dugong
Turtles
Turtle eggs
Mussels
Crabs
Shell fish
Rock Oysters
Crocodiles
Fish
Prawns

Vegetables and Fruits

Yams
Cycad Palm nuts
Pandanus Palm fruit
Apples (several varieties)
Plums
Bush Potatoes
Berries (several varieties)
Livistonia Palm stems
Zamia Palm nuts

Land Meats

Wallabies
Flying Foxes
Possums
Geese
Ducks
Carpet Snakes
Goannas
Bandicoots
Witchetty grubs
Mangrove worms

Wild Honey

Sugarbag

Fig. 4 Source: *Field Observations and discussions with various informants, 1960-1965.*

The Tiwi saw themselves as the chosen people, safe in their island home passed to them by Murtankala, their Creator Figure, and practising ceremonies brought into being by Purrukuparli and other spirit ancestors. The Tiwi were socially, culturally, linguistically, spiritually, and, to some extent, historically distinct from the mainland Aboriginal society. There were also physical differences, but questions remain unanswered as to whether and to what extent outside people contributed to those physical differences. There is no doubt that as permanent contact with mainland Aborigines developed, the Tiwi themselves realised these diversities, seeing

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

themselves as being distinct from other indigenous Australians. Some 300 years ago they were unaware of their mainland neighbours. More importantly, at some date in the distant past, possibly in the seventeenth century or before, the Tiwi learnt that they were not the sole inhabitants of the world as newcomers sailed into their cosmos.

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- ¹ Some differences exist in respect of the Tiwi names for the three islands in the Potinga group. Ward, T.A., *Towards An Understanding of the Tiwi Language/Culture Context: A Handbook for Non-Tiwi Teachers*, Nguiu: Nguiu Nginingawila Literature Production Centre, 1990, p. 11, lists these as Muma, Walapanji and Punarliyi. Mountford, C.P., *The Tiwi, their Art, Myth and Ceremony*, London: Phoenix House, 1958, p. 14, cites Waitbak as the Tiwi name for North-west Vernon Island. Interviewed at Nguiu, 7/11/1995, Tiwi elder John Baptist Pupangamirri gave the names of the three islands as Muma, Wodbutj and Bar-nin, but he felt that there was a possibility that the names he gave originated from the mainland. Bar-nin could be a corruption of Vernon.
 - ² Long, Jeremy, *The Go-Betweens*, Darwin: North Australian Research Unit Australian National University, 1992, p. 39; Harney, W.E., *Life Among the Aborigines*, London: Robert Hale, 1957, pp. 80-81. Harney refers to Panarli as "Bunali".
 - ³ Interview with Marie Clare Porkilari and Matthias Ulungura, Paru, 3/7/1965; Pilling, A.R., *Law and Feud in an Aboriginal Society of North Australia*, PhD dissertation, University of California, 1957, p. 38.
 - ⁴ *South Australian Register*, 1/6/1897, p. 6; Klaatsch, H., "Some Notes on Scientific Travel Amongst the Black Population of Tropical Australia in 1904-05-06". In *Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Adelaide, Report*, Vol. xi, 1907, p. 584; Bauer, F.H., *Historical Geography of White Settlement in Part of Northern Australia*, Part 2, *The Katherine - Darwin Region*, Divisional Report, CSIRO Division of Land Research and Regional Survey, No. 64/1, Canberra: CSIRO, 1964, p. 193.
 - ⁵ Basedow, H., "Notes on the Natives of Bathurst Island, North Australia". In *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 43, 1913, p. 291; Hart, C.W.M., "The Sons of Turimpi". In *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 1954, p. 243.
 - ⁶ *Kam Yan - Tiwi Islands*, ABC-TV, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1995. Screened 26/1/1996.
 - ⁷ Lee, Jennifer, *Tiwi Today, A Study of Language Change in a Contact Situation*, Pacific Linguistics Series C - No. 96, Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1987, p. 1; Hart, C.W.M., Pilling, A.R. and Goodale, J.C. *The Tiwi of North Australia*, Fort Worth: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1988, p. 136.
 - ⁸ Osborne, C.R., *The Tiwi Language*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974, p. 1.
 - ⁹ *Art of the Tiwi*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1994, p. 1, refers to "...the unique art and culture of the Tiwi people...". Horton, David (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994, Vol. 2, p. 1075.
 - ¹⁰ Hart, C.W.M., "The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands". In *Oceania*, Vol. 1, 1930, p. 171; Spencer, W.B., *Native Tribes of the Northern Territory of Australia*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1914, p. 46.
 - ¹¹ Pilling, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
 - ¹² Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.* p. 13-15; Hart, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176.
 - ¹³ Personal observations at Wadeye (Port Keats), 1971-1975, and Gunditjmarra people in Western Victoria, 1981-1998. Clark, I.D., *Aboriginal Languages and Clans: An Historical Atlas*

- of Western and Central Victoria, 1800-1900, Monash Publications in Geography No. 37, Melbourne: Monash University, 1900, pp. 23-26, looks at the status of the name "Gundidjmara" (Gunditjmara). See Stanner, W.E.H., *Murinbata Kinship and Totemism*. In *Oceania*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1936, pp. 186-187, about the naming of the *Murin* groups.
- ¹⁴ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 12; discussions with Jerry Kerinauia and other members of the Tiwi community during 1960-1965; *Kam Yan*, "Tiwi Islands", ABC-TV, 1996.
- ¹⁵ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Art of the Tiwi, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Turner, D.H., "Level of organisation and communication in Aboriginal Australia". In Peterson, N. (Ed.), *Tribes and Boundaries in Australia*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1976, p. 182; Personal observations of Tiwi discussions, 1960-1965.
- ¹⁶ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 5. According to Osborne, *Tiwi* means "human beings". Lee, Jennifer R., *Ngawurrangurumagi Ngingawila Ngapangiraga*, Darwin: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1993, p. 134., and *Ngingawila Ngapangiraga*, Nguiu: Nguiu Ngingawila Literature Production Centre, 1979, p. 19, p. 64, identify *Tiwi* as meaning "people", being the plural of *tini* ("man") and *tinga* ("woman"). During my work with older Islander people in the 1960s, *Tiwi* was said to mean "we" or "us, the people".
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*; Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 16-17.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 12-13, 16-17.
- ²⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 20-21.
- ²¹ Goodale, Jane C., *Tiwi Wives*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974, pp. 14, 16.
- ²² Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 172.
- ²³ Spencer, *op. cit.*, p. 45; Pilling, *op. cit.*, pp. 374-375; Osborne, *op. cit.*, pp. xii and 167 - 168; Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ²⁴ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
- ²⁵ See, for instance, Forrest, Peter, *The Tiwi Meet the Dutch: The First European Contacts*, Darwin: Tiwi Land Council, 1995, p. 5; Mountford (1958), *op. cit.*, p. 25; Allen, Louis A., *Time Before Morning*, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975, pp. 89-90.
- ²⁶ The story as told by Tiwi elder Beatrice Kerinauia is contained in *Murtankala the creator*, Nguiu: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, 1994.
- ²⁷ Earl, G.S.W., *The Native Tribes of the Indian Archipelago: Papuans*, London: Hippolyte Bailliere, 1853, p. 189.
- ²⁸ Earl, G.S.W., *Enterprise, Discoveries and Adventures in Australia*, London: Madden and Malcolm, n.d. (1856), p.8.
- ²⁹ Docker, E.G., *Simply Human Beings*, Brisbane: Jacaranda Press, 1964, p. 212.
- ³⁰ Hill, Ernestine, *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens, 1940, p. 192.
- ³¹ Clune, Frank, *To The Isles of Spice*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1940, p. 63.
- ³² Lindsay, H.A., "The First Australians". In Clow, Archie and Nan (Eds.), *Science News 43*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, February, 1957, p. 59. Birdsell's theory of three waves of different racial stocks migrating into Australia, from which this claim came, is no longer accepted in anthropology.
- ³³ Coon, C.S., *The Origin of Races*, New York: Knopf, 1962, p 92.
- ³⁴ Campbell, John, "Geographical Memoir of Melville Island and Port Essington, on the Cobourg Peninsula, Northern Australia; with some observations on the Settlements which have been

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- established on the North Coast of New Holland”, *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 4, 1834, p. 152.
- ³⁵ Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 168; Spencer, W.B., *Wanderings in Wild Australia*, London: Macmillan, 1928, (2 Vols.), Vol. 2, pp. 643-644; Murphy, J.F., “Bathurst Island, A Mission Station for Aborigines”. In *Australia*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1/3/1920, p. 78; Klaatsch, H., *op. cit.*, p. 585; King, P.P., *Narrative of a Survey of the Intertropical and West Coasts of Australia Performed Between the Years 1818 to 1822*, (2 Vols.), London: Murray, 1827, p. 114.
- ³⁶ Howells, W.W., and Warner, W.L., *Anthropometry of the Natives of Arnhem Land and the Australian Race Problem, Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Peabody Museum, 1937. pp. 15-19. See also, Berndt, R.M. and C.H., *The World of the First Australians*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1968, p. 16.
- ³⁷ Flynn, Frank, *Distant Horizons*, Kensington: Sacred Heart Monastery, 1947, p. 75.
- ³⁸ Ennis, Henry, *Remarks on Board His Majesty’s Ship Tamar in a Voyage from England to Port Praia, Cape of Good Hope, New South Wales, and from thence along the coast of Australia to Port Essington in the Cobourg Peninsula, and thence to Bathurst and Melville Islands, Apsley’s Straits, between 27th February and 13th of November, 1824; and continued in the ship Countess of Harcourt, to the Isle of France, to 7th February 1825*, South Melbourne: Richard Griffen, 1983 (originally published in *Monthly Magazine*, London, 1825, Issues 413-417), pp. 18-19. Ennis was supernumerary purser on the *Tamar*.
- ³⁹ James, Barbara, *No Man’s Land, Women of the Northern Territory*, Sydney: Collins, 1989, p. 18.
- ⁴⁰ Spencer, W.B., “The Aborigines of Australia”. In Knibbs, G.H. (ed.), *Federal Handbook on Australia, British Association for the Advancement of Science, Australian Meeting, 1914*, Melbourne: Government Printer, 1914, p. 79; Spencer, W.B., “Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory”. In *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1912*, p. 37.
- ⁴¹ Mountford (1958), *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- ⁴² Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Hart (1930), *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- ⁴³ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 149, lists the word *temanamini*. Interviews with John Baptist Pupangamirri, Nguui, 9/11/1995, and Justin Puruntatameri, Pularumpi, 10/11/1995.
- ⁴⁴ In 1912, Spencer recorded and noted Tiwi men singing, accompanied by the music of didgeridoos (didjeridus). Moyle, Alice, “Sir Baldwin Spencer’s Recordings of Australian Aboriginal Singing”. In *Memoirs of the National Museum of Victoria*, Vol. 24, December, 1959, pp. 13-14, suggests the didgeridoo players were Iwaidja (mainland) Aborigines employed on Melville Island by R.J.(Joe) Cooper, not Tiwi men. See Chapter Five. Only on two occasions did I witness Tiwi men playing a didgeridoo (didjeridu). Both incidents occurred in Paru village, on Melville Island, and each was a mortuary ritual of mainland origin brought in by Cooper’s Iwaidja prior to 1916. The first was observed on 26/3/1964, and involved several Maung men from Goulburn Island, on the Arnhem Land coast. The second ritual, on 2/1/1965, was described to me as “little bit business, not much”.
- ⁴⁵ West, M.K.C., *Art for Money’s Sake: The Art and Craft Enterprises on Bathurst Island*, MA thesis, Australian National University, December, 1988, p. 6.
- ⁴⁶ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
- ⁴⁷ *Northern Territory Standard*, 4/11/1949, p. 3; Pilling, *op. cit.*, pp. 35, 210; Catholic Church, Nguui, Deaths Register, entry number 221; discussions with various Tiwi, Nguui, 1960.
- ⁴⁸ Hoff, Jennifer, *Tiwi Graveposts*, Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 1988, p. 4; Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

- ⁴⁹ House, James Jnr., "Tiwi Burial Poles as Sculpture". In *Expedition*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Fall, 1959, p. 16.
- ⁵⁰ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- ⁵¹ Art of the Tiwi, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- ⁵² Spencer (1912), *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- ⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 54; Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 670; Klaatsch, *op. cit.*, pp. 586, 589; Spencer (1914a), *op. cit.*, p. 43; Spencer (1912), *op. cit.*, p. 54; Klaatsch, *op. cit.*, p. 586; Clune, *op. cit.*; p. 64; Basedow, H., *The Australian Aboriginal*, Adelaide: Preece and Sons, 1925, p. 238
- ⁵⁴ Mountford, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
- ⁵⁵ Klaatsch, *op. cit.*, p. 589.
- ⁵⁶ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
- ⁵⁷ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 2; Lee, J., "Tiwi A Language Struggling to Survive". In M.J. Ray (Ed.), *Aboriginal Language Use in the Northern Territory: Five Reports*, Darwin: Summer Institute of Linguistics, Australian Aborigines and Islanders Branch, May, 1988, p. 80; Lee (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 3; Harris, J.A.W., *Northern Territory Pidgin's (sic) and the Origin of Kriol*, Pacific Linguistics Series C - No. 89, Canberra: Department of Linguistics, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1986, p. 103; Basedow, *op. cit.*, p. 291.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Mena, Noel, John and Clarence Puantulura and Leo Tungutalum, Nguui, 8/1/1995.
- ⁵⁹ *Tiwi Land Council Eleventh Annual Report 1989/90*, Darwin: Tiwi Land Council, 1990, p. 7.
- ⁶⁰ Berndt, C.H., "Expressions of Grief Among Aboriginal Women". In *Oceania*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1950, p. 288; Spencer (1914a), *op. cit.*, p. 91.
- ⁶¹ Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 35-38; Babui, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20; Brandl, Maria, "Adaptation or Disintegration? Changes in the Kulama Initiation and Increase Ritual of Melville and Bathurst Islands, Northern Territory of Australia". In *Anthropological Forum*, Vol. 11, No. 4, November, 1970, pp. 464 - 479; Goodale, Jane C., "An Example of Ritual Change Among the Tiwi of Melville Island." In Pilling, A.R. and Waterman, R.A. (eds.), *Diprotodont to Detribalization*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970, pp. 350-366.
- ⁶² Ward, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-38; Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-102; Douglas, W.O., "Jiberabu". In *Colliers*, 26/11/1954, pp. 28-31; Spencer (1914a), *op. cit.*, pp. 228-23.
- ⁶³ Gsell, F.X., *The Bishop with 150 Wives*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1956, p. 68.
- ⁶⁴ Berndt and Berndt, *op. cit.*, p. 142; Berndt, C.H., *op. cit.*, p. 288; Spencer (1914b), *op. cit.*, pp. 47, 49; Basedow (1913), *op. cit.*, p. 296.
- ⁶⁵ Berndt, C.H., *op. cit.*, p. 306.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 289-290, 301.
- ⁶⁷ Willey, Keith, "Mission to the Islands". In *Walkabout*, Vol. 31, No. 12, 1965, p. 51; Beatty, Bill, *Next Door to Paradise*, Melbourne: Cassell Australia, 1965, p. 32.
- ⁶⁸ Cook, C.E., *The Epidemiology of Leprosy in Australia*, Commonwealth Department of Health Services Publication No. 38, Canberra: Government Printer, 1927, p.106; Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- ⁶⁹ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
- ⁷⁰ Beatty, *op. cit.*, p. 32; Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 66; Interviews with Clarence Puantulura, Nguui, 7/11/1995 and John Baptist Pupangamirri, Nguui, 9/11/1995: Both men confirmed my observations from the period 1960-1965 and 1969-1974, that "witch doctors" and "medicine men" did not exist in Tiwi society. "Witch doctors" did not exist in Aboriginal and Islander society. The term "medicine man" is now frowned upon by some anthropologists.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ⁷¹ Interview with Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 2/10/1964.
- ⁷² Pilling, *op. cit.*, p. 197. Alan Kerinauia and Jerry Kerinauia, interviewed, Nguiu, 17/4/1964 and 25/8/1964, respectively.
- ⁷³ Worms, E., *Australian Aboriginal Religions*, Richmond: Spectrum Publications, 1986, p. 168; Pilling, *op. cit.*, p. 188; discussions with various members of the Tiwi community during the early 1960s.
- ⁷⁴ Interview with John Baptist Pupangamirri and Barry Puruntatameri, Nguiu, 7/11/1995.
- ⁷⁵ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39 and 58.

Chapter two

Survey, Intrusion and Conflict

(The Distant Past to 1818)

There is no clear indication as to whether Tiwi culture grew out of possible contacts with other countries or whether its uniqueness evolved entirely within the isolation of the Tiwi people over some thousands of years. What is known, however, is that in historical times they were visited by a range of European seafarers before 1818. There were occasional visits by Dutch explorers and possibly Portuguese slave raids on Melville Island. The exploration work of Nicolas Baudin is an important part of that history as is that of Australian-born seaman Phillip Parker King. At some unknown date seafarers from the Indonesian Archipelago made their initial landfall in the Tiwi Islands, the first of a number of intermittent visits over at least several centuries.

Primary documentation on early visits by Europeans is difficult to access. In many instances such documents are held in Indonesia, Timor, Holland and Portugal. Secondary sources have been useful but still provide limited information. The Islanders' response to some of the meetings with outside forces is quite unknown as these were often not recorded. The effect of even partial acculturation on the retention of oral history is quite evident among the Tiwi today. Detailed knowledge evident in the memories of elders thirty five years ago is not retained to such an extent by the present generation. While this chapter seeks to set out the recorded and possible intercultural contacts in the Tiwi Islands during this period to 1818, the opportunity does not exist for discussion from the Islander's point of view.

Prior to the Tiwi Islands being physically separated from mainland Australia at the end of the last Ice Age, the Tiwi, in all probability, had some degree of contact with neighbouring Aboriginal tribes, although their distinctive cultural system suggests this was very limited. It is not known at what time in their geographic isolation the Islanders encountered the first visitors from the outside world. A crucial question here is, whether important aspects of Tiwi culture evolved internally or grew out of some external influence. The Tiwi have no retained memory on this aspect. While the Islanders can turn to the mythical stories of the *palangarri*, the time long ago, to narrate the events surrounding the creation of their cosmos and to explain who initially performed their ceremonies, there is nothing in their oral history indicating whether, in fact, there were any outside influences on the ritual or on their material culture. No primary European documentation exists to prove or disprove suggestions put forward on possible diffusion of culture from outside sources into the islands. The range and extent of academic theory on this topic is demonstrated by the opinions of a number of anthropologists. In

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

the view of pioneer social scientists Herbert Basedow and Walter Baldwin Spencer “the un-Australian (*non-Aboriginal*) features of the Melville and Bathurst Islands culture were probably due to influences from the islands to the north of Australia”.¹ Casey and Massola hypothesise that the shape of the Tiwi grave posts or ‘*turtini*’ had their origins in the ‘*dubu*’, carved and painted posts produced on the coast of Papua’s Central District.² According to Worms, “Oceanic-Indonesian cultures show through” the Tiwi posts. The funerary posts of the Upper Kumusi and Lower Mambare Rivers of southern Papua, for instance, bear the same artistic patterns as those of the Tiwi.³ On the other hand, Margaret King suggests that burial poles in eastern-most Timor are the source of influence for the Tiwi ‘*turtini*’, resolving in her mind the search by Mountford for this source.⁴

Surveying Papuan influences on the culture of Arnhem Land and neighbouring islands, McCarthy notes that ritual armlets worn by the Tiwi are also used in Papua-New Guinea. It is possible that other Tiwi ornaments were introduced by Papuans, but this cannot be established. McCarthy also suggests that the cicatrised pattern of Tiwi body scarring has its counterpart in West New Guinea (Irian Jaya).⁵ If culture was diffused from New Guinea and Timor to the Tiwi Islands the question of the method by which such movement occurred remains unsolved. However, the concept is supported in a general manner by the positive discussion about the movement of material culture into northern Australia from Papua, Melanesia and Malaya (Indonesia).⁶ More specifically, it is supported by Spencer’s statement that the Tiwi mourning ceremonies are also interesting because they differ so completely from any in the northern part of the mainland and seem to point to the fact that the Tiwi had either developed those ceremonies themselves or had derived them from some other people with whom they, but, apparently not the mainland Aborigines, had come into contact.⁷ Others suggest possible sea contact between Papua and the Tiwi Islands, citing contact between New Guinea and Arnhem Land or Indonesia. Although McCarthy’s proposal does not specifically refer to the Tiwi Islands, if it is correct cultural material from West New Guinea could have been carried to Arnhem Land via Aru Island by Macassan travellers.⁸ Cultural contact between West New Guinea and the Tiwi Islands could possibly have occurred in a similar manner. A trade link between Timor and the Tiwi Islands is also indicated by McCarthy although he does not elaborate on this link. One point not raised in this debate is the time factor.

Consideration must also be given to inter-cultural encounters which must have occurred at some point in the last Ice Age when New Guinea, Aru and other islands and the Tiwi group were linked together as part of the land mass of the then Greater Australia. While Worms points out that similarities in cultural matters do not relate to proof, there is enough anthropological evidence to suggest that some form of contact could have occurred between the Tiwi and people from Timor and New Guinea.⁹ However, the path or paths of diffusion have not been established. One positive point arising out of this school of thought is the clear indication that the theorists identify Tiwi culture as something distinct in indigenous Australia. Without definite grounds to establish otherwise, it must be taken that at the time the Tiwi initially saw Europeans their culture and lifestyle were relatively stable and static.

With the exception of visitors from the Indonesian Archipelago and possibly from New Guinea, the Tiwi remained ensconced in the isolation of their islands for thousands of years. At some stage in the sixteenth or seventeenth century the Tiwi saw a European

vessel for the first time. There is not only a suggestion of Dutch and Portuguese knowledge of Melville Island centuries before European exploration of the islands began, but also a theory that the Tiwi Islands were reported by the Portuguese in 1525.¹⁰ Evidence of such knowledge has yet to be substantiated. Tiwi oral history today offers no insight into the earliest visitors to their shores. The first verified person to sight the islands was Pieterzoon (or Pietesz). Without relevant evidence it is not possible to clarify whether any of the Islanders observed his exploration party. In 1636, Anthony van Diemen, Dutch Governor-General at Batavia, despatched two vessels, the *Cleen Amsterdam* and *Wessel (Wesel)*, to explore Australia's coastline. Following the death of the expedition's leader, Gerrit Tomez (Thomasz) Pool or Poel, Subcargo Pieter Pieterszoon assumed command of the ships. In June 1636, he spent nine days exploring the northern coastline of the Melville Island for a distance of 20 miles.¹¹ Pieterszoon's ships operated close to the shore, riding at anchor from 16 to 18 June while repairs were carried out. Pieterszoon paddled close along the shore in a canoe, going ashore, as his seamen did, in several places to explore beaches that gave the impression of having not previously been disturbed by human beings. Apart from smoke being visible in various localities, no evidence was seen of human habitation. The failure of the Dutch to make contact with the Tiwi and to sight any recognisable fruit trees and other resources resulted in the decision by Pieterszoon to sail north to Timor and Tanimbar. On 20 June 1636, he departed from Melville Island without recognising its insularity. His point of departure was referred to as "Rooden Hoeck" or Red Point. It is now known as Cape Van Diemen. Pieterszoon named the north coast of Melville Island, "van Diemenslant" or "Van Diemen's Land".

The fact that no Tiwi were noticed could have been due to any of several reasons. The smoke sighted was further into the interior, an indication that at the height of the dry season all members of the bands of northern Melville Island were moving inland through their respective territories. Their movement at this time of the year occurred in small household groups, operating only collectively at mortuary rituals for deceased "big men". Alternatively, some households could have been in the vicinity of the northern beaches when the expedition arrived. Upon sighting the ships they may have moved into the interior also, as a result of fear or suspicion. It must be borne in mind that if the ships and seamen were observed, this could well have been the first time that this occurred. The Tiwi had possibly come into contact with praus and other small craft previously, but this could have been their initial experience with a larger sailing ship. Whenever it did occur, their first experience with Europeans, physically and culturally different to the Asians and Papuans, was, no doubt, a dramatic and, perhaps, unsettling experience for the Tiwi. Historical documentation suggests that this did not take place until 1705. If this is correct, the Islanders were to be isolated from contact with Europeans for another sixty nine years following Pieterszoon's visit.

In the interim, another Dutch explorer, Abel Janszoon Tasman, sighted the Tiwi Islands, but also did not venture ashore. His three vessels, the *Limmen*, *Zeemeeuw* and *Bracc* entered Dundas Strait, anchoring in Van Diemen Gulf below the Cobourg Peninsula in 1644. Tasman failed to perceive the true status of Dundas Strait, naming it Van Diemen's Bay. He then sailed westwards along the north coasts of Melville and Bathurst Islands. Travelling some distance out from the shoreline Tasman, like Pieterszoon, took the islands to be high promontories of the mainland. Except for a few notes made by Burgomaster Witsen, who travelled with Tasman, no written records of the voyage remain.¹² In a report to the Dutch East India Company Tasman stated that he "...did not

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

discover anything important, but only found wretched naked beachcombers". This comment was most probably aimed at mainland Aborigines rather than the Tiwi, although Forrest associates it with Tasman's voyage along the coast of the Tiwi Islands.¹³

The earliest known contact between Europeans and Tiwi in 1705 is important enough in the ethnohistory of the Islanders to warrant its being referred to in some detail. Maarten van Delft left Batavia on 20 January with instructions to explore the Van Diemen Bay shown on maps of Tasman's expedition of 1644, before proceeding to "Aarnemland" (Arnhem Land) and the Gulf of Carpentaria.¹⁴ Van Delft was requested to invite a few Aborigines to travel to Batavia when he returned from Australia. Unless any of the Tiwi saw the sailors on Tasman's and Pieterszoon's off-shore vessels, the Islanders were about to come into contact with what they thought to be ghosts (*wakkurtapa*). Despite the reported failure of previous Dutch explorers to recognise the insular status of the Tiwi Islands, the instructions given to van Delft states in part, "...to run in sight of Van Diemensland in Hollandia Nova, which point is said to consist altogether of islands, a matter that will thus be cleared up".¹⁵ On 2 April 1705, the expedition's three ships, the *Vossenbosch*, *Wayer* and *Nova Hollandia* (*Nieuw Holland*) reached Australia, after being delayed in Timor. The actual point of land first sighted is disputed, as are several other details of van Delft's exploration of parts of the islands.¹⁶ There is, for instance, possibly some confusion about the dates on which van Delft met various groups of Tiwi, as the Julian calendar, rather than the Gregorian calendar, may have still been in use in the Dutch East Indies in 1705. Halls suggests that the Cobourg Peninsula was the locality first sighted by van Delft, whereas according to Forrest, the point in question was "...probably the north western shore of Bathurst island, about the area presently called Cape Helvetius". Hart, Pilling and Goodale state that "...the entire west coast of Bathurst Island was explored", indicating an agreement with Forrest's theory. Powell concurs that the site was "probably the shore of Bathurst Island somewhere to the west of Cape van Diemen", while an official report prepared at Batavia Castle on 6 October 1705, states in part, "...on the second of April, they explored the north-west corner of Van Diemen's Land...", indicating the area to be the northern end of Bathurst Island or north-western Melville Island. Whatever the actual locality, smoke was seen at several places, but nothing remarkable was noted about the land. Van Delft sailed into an inlet, which Forrest identifies as St. Asaph Bay, at the northern mouth of Apsley Strait. In this inlet, called Roseboom's Bay by van Delft, signs of habitation were observed but no actual people seen until the bay or inlet was left. For the first time an undetermined number of Tiwi were noted, both adults and children, with their dogs, running from the Dutch explorers, "...and no opportunity was obtained of getting speech of any of them".¹⁷ The official report on the expedition records that of two projecting points, "which turned out to be islands, one was named Goede Hoop, and the other Kuijle Eijland (sic)".¹⁸

The first two recorded landings by the Dutch in New Holland, in this case on Cape York in 1606 and 1623, ended in disaster due to the hostility of the Aboriginal groups met by the seafarers.¹⁹ In comparison, van Delft, who attempted to make a friendly approach to Aboriginal people whenever he met them during this expedition, was at times successful.²⁰ It is from his expedition that the first knowledge of the Tiwi was gained. The initial meeting between Islanders and van Delft's party, however, was in no way friendly. Sailing into what Forrest identifies as Shark Bay on 31 April (possibly 23 April, if the Julian Calendar was in use), members of the expedition who landed from the

ships were confronted by fourteen or fifteen Tiwi men. The consternation of the Islanders upon seeing strange vessels and people with a white appearance is understandable. This was something unexplained in their cosmos. The Tiwi reaction here is similar to that of other Aboriginal groups and the Torres Strait Islanders who initially considered Europeans to be the reincarnation of some of their deceased people. The Tiwi held the Europeans to be people from the spirit world. Running towards a small hill the Tiwi signalled to the seamen to go away. The gesturing and yelling having failed, the Tiwi, described as “being very agile and well made”, resorted to a spear attack.²¹ In Halls’ words,

*The sailors advanced into a shower of spears and one young man, perhaps more nervous than the rest, raised his musket and fired. It was a lucky shot for he wounded the chief, and the natives then fled away into the bush.*²²

Forrest claims that the Tiwi forced the seamen to retreat and that the incident demonstrated to the Dutch that the Islanders had to be treated with respect and caution.²³ What actually occurred is difficult to say, as Van Delft’s journal and papers were confiscated when he died in Macassar on 8 August, 1705. For several weeks after this incident friendly relations existed between Europeans and Tiwi. The latter must have realised that these newcomers were humans like themselves. The wounded Tiwi man was treated by the ship’s surgeon, but later he tore the bandages off. At various times some of the Tiwi visited the *Vossenbosch* and possibly the other vessels, being allowed to examine whatever they showed an interest in. They gave fish and crabs to the seamen and were given presents in return.

It is from van Delft that we have the earliest known documented knowledge of the Tiwi. The expedition members took time to observe the Tiwi, although their observations were, in keeping with the period, ethnocentric. In colour and stature, they recorded, the Tiwi appeared to resemble the Indians of the east. While the men were naked, the women and children wore coverings of leaves or the like. The women were noted to be tall and thin, the Tiwi of both sexes having curly hair like the Papuans. Of interest to the Dutch also were the body paint and scarring of the Islanders. Of more importance to van Delft was the expedition’s observations of the artifacts and food sources of the Tiwi. The explorers, however, were unaware of the wide range of marine, animal and birdlife and medicinal resources available to, and used by, the Islanders. From a Dutch point of view, the islands and their residents possessed nothing of economic value.²⁴

The expedition’s vessels moved eastward along the Melville Island shoreline. On the day van Delft was to leave the island, eight Tiwi men attacked and wounded two sailors, attempting to seize their clothing. Why this happened is not known. Some action by a member or members of the expedition could have led to the confrontation or the Tiwi may have decided to seize some desired goods by force. To the Dutch, “the nature of these tribes (was) foul and treacherous, as was apparent at the last moment, when our people were on the point of departing”.²⁵ The Tiwi may have felt that the Dutch had stayed too long and were becoming trespassers on their land. There is no indication of Islander women visiting the Dutch camp or the vessels, so in all probability, no assault occurred upon any of the females, however it is unlikely to have been repeated if such action did occur. Forrest suggests that upon learning that the Dutch were to depart, the Tiwi, probably believing they were entitled to final gifts as a repayment for their hospitality during the expedition’s stay, decided to claim the sailors’ clothing.²⁶ This suggestion concurs with the indigenous practice of giving, sharing and reciprocating.

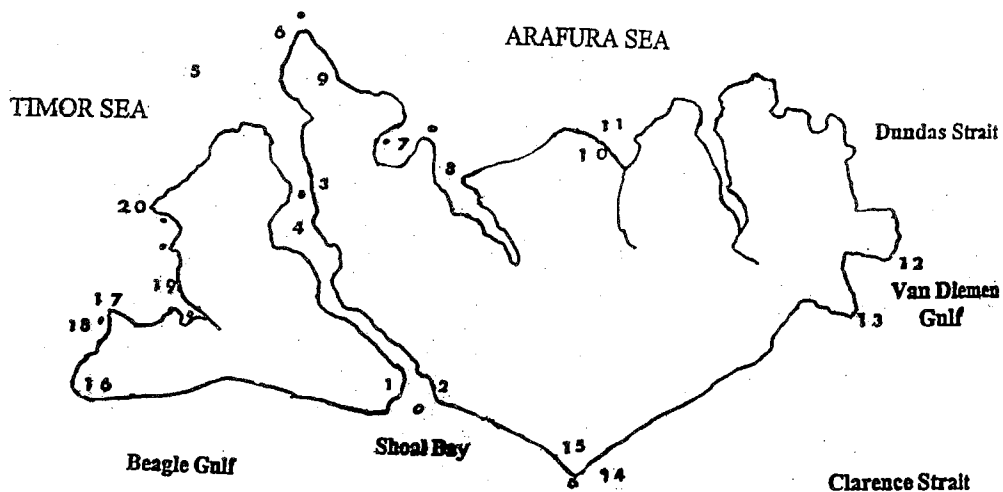
The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

However, we can only agree with Powell that “what the Tiwi believed to be the truth of the matter is unknown”.²⁷ As they sailed for the mainland, the Dutch felt that their efforts to establish friendly relations with the Tiwi had been unsuccessful.²⁸ Still Van Delft had learnt more about the Tiwi Islands and their inhabitants than his predecessors. His chart was more accurate than that of Tasman, but it related to only part of the west coast of Bathurst Island and the north coast of Melville Island.²⁹ As far as records indicate, no further landings were made on the Tiwi Islands by the Dutch. The visits appear to have had little cultural effect upon the Islanders.

Documentary evidence of early Asian visits to the Tiwi Islands is difficult to locate. It is possible that a Chinese trader visited the Tiwi Islands in 1751. The trader sailed southward from Timor, arriving after five days at a place where he was met by friendly people with whom he spent two days. These people he described as being of “more than ordinary length and stature, very black and the hair woolly, but rather long”, a description consistent with those for the Tiwi.³⁰

Some evidence exists for Melville Island being subjected to slave-raids during the eighteenth century, although this is not conclusive. Earl, who operated on the North Coast and in the Indies in the 1830s, writes that

According to the testimony of the older inhabitants of Timor, Melville Island was only less a source of slavery than New Guinea, in proportion to its smaller extent of surface, at the period in which the slave-trade was encouraged or connived at by the European authorities in the Archipelago. However, there is no reason to suppose that the island has recently been visited by slavers, for although the words used by the natives on the occasion of Captain King's visit were



MAP 6

LOCALITIES - TIWI ISLANDS

KEY		
1. Nguu	8. Snake Bay	15. Panarli
2. Paru	9. Im-mari-junga	16. Cape Fourcroy
3. Garden Point	10. Takambi	17. Cape Helvetius
4. Apsley Straight	11. Lethbridge Bay	18. Wanganui Rock
5. Mermaid Reef	12. Soldier Point	19. Port Hurd
6. Cape Van Diemen	13. Cape Keith	20. Rocky Point
7. Shark Bay	14. Cape Gambier	

*undoubtedly Portuguese, they may have been acquired at a much earlier period.*³¹

In a more sweeping statement, James claims that

*Not all contact with foreign cultures had been peaceful, however. It is believed that from 1600 to 1800 the Portuguese from Timor raided Melville Island and took the young Tiwi tribesmen as slaves. The acts of aggression probably contributed to the hostile and suspicious attitude the Tiwi took towards some of the early British residents when they made their first official claims on Northern Territory land.*³²

James offers no evidence or references to support her comment about the slave-raids. Neither does Stanley who simply states “It is probable that the Portuguese obtained slaves from the islands in the eighteenth century.”³³

Pilling suggests that the slave-raids occurred in the last part of the eighteenth century.³⁴ According to Powell, some evidence exists for Portuguese slave-raids on “Bathurst and Melville Islands”.³⁵ Upon arriving at Melville Island in 1818, King was greeted by an elderly Island woman frequently calling out “Ven aca, Ven aca”, the words referred to by Earl, above. Campbell claimed that “Vin aca! Vin aca!” was a Portuguese term, meaning “Come here! Come here!”.³⁶ Campbell, in fact, cited several other circumstances which, with the old lady’s words, led him to believe that vessels of Portuguese or some other nationality might have visited Melville Island on slave-raids. For one thing, Malay fishermen were allegedly forbidden to visit Melville Island, which they called “Amba” (“a slave”), claiming that it was “infested by pirates - probably slavers”.³⁷ In addition to this, Campbell considered that possibly a lad, briefly detained at Fort Dundas in 1825, had been taken off a Malay slave-ship and raised by the Tiwi. The lad, said Campbell, had Malay features and colouring. Harris points out the failure of Campbell to recognise that several words used by a Tiwi prisoner were probably of Portuguese origin. These were “piccanini”, meaning “children”, and “pakee” meaning “peace”.³⁸ The miming actions by a Tiwi man indicating a fear of being hanged also led Campbell to his opinion about slave-raids. But such words could have been given to the Tiwi by Macassan trepangers who used a “Portuguese-Malay” trade pidgin in the Timor-East Indies region.³⁹

One indication that slave-running was occurring out of Timor even into the nineteenth century is the fact that a French ship had just taken on a cargo of slaves at Dili, in Timor, when a vessel arrived there from Fort Dundas on Melville Island in 1826. An English ship, flying the Dutch flag, was also reportedly engaged in a similar activity.⁴⁰ Whether this slavery extended to the Tiwi Islands can only be resolved by examination of material in the Portuguese archives.⁴¹ Whatever the truth, the ferocity of the Tiwi towards outsiders, such as explorers, Macassans and the garrison at Fort Dundas, is considered by a number of historians to be the result of Portuguese slave-raids.⁴²

As European history records, no other Europeans approached the Tiwi Islands until a French expedition under Nicolas Baudin explored the coastline of south-western Bathurst Island in June, 1803.⁴³ Baudin, travelling in the corvettes, *Le Geographe* and *Le Naturaliste*, named Capes Fourcroy and Helvetius on Bathurst Island, but he apparently did not go ashore. The next known explorer to visit the islands, Lieutenant Phillip Parker King, made contact with some of their inhabitants. The survey of the Tiwi Islands by the Australian born King in 1818 revealed to British interests that they were

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

indeed islands, and lead to the lessening of the cultural isolation of the Tiwi people as more activity occurred in the region.⁴⁴

Towards the end of April 1818, King's vessel, the cutter *Mermaid*, moved around the Cobourg Peninsula into Dundas Strait and Van Diemen Gulf. By 10 May, King steered northwards up the Gulf to the eastern-most point of Melville Island. During the night several bright fires were noticed in the region of Soldier Point. Sailing along the north coast of Melville Island, King twice observed Tiwi people but did not communicate with them. To the west of Point Jahleel two Islanders walking along the beach apparently failed to notice the *Mermaid*. On 14 May, seven people were seen travelling across Lethbridge Bay in a canoe. Cape Van Diemen was rounded on the next day, King anchoring off Luxmore Head on Melville Island. At this stage, he was unaware that he was inside the northern end of what he later named Apsley Strait which separates Bathurst and Melville Islands. The 15 May being a Sunday, King decided to take his bearings from the summit of Luxmore Head before allowing his crew of 19 men to rest for the remainder of the day. However, an incident occurred which demonstrated King's diplomacy and humanity in dealing with Aborigines, and which became a topic in Tiwi oral history, as recounted to Pilling in about 1953.

Leaving most of their weapons in a boat on the beach, King's party climbed the head. There, King fired a fowling piece at an 'iguana' (lizard). A group of Tiwi, hiding nearby, thought they were being fired on which suggested familiarity with the workings of European weapons. A surveyor with King's party lit his pipe. The Tiwi, recorded Pilling, seeing the spark and smoke, ducked, thinking a matchlock gun was being lit.⁴⁵ The Islanders suddenly appeared before the explorers, forcing them to quickly retreat down to their boat. Fortunately, the British safely reached the small boat where their muskets were stowed. The retreat had left the party's theodolite stand and an insect net belonging to the expedition's botanist, Allan Cunningham, on Luxmore Head. The Tiwi seized both of these objects. The seamen, now armed, parleyed with the Islanders for the return of the seized items, but without success. The Tiwi, did, however, guide the boat's crew to fresh water, but King's party, confronted by about 30 Tiwi men, remained in the boat. The Tiwi, meanwhile, using signs and sounds, asked for axes, and the British eventually exchanged a small number of files and chisels and a tomahawk for a basket of sago-palm fruit and a 'basket' of water.⁴⁶ The latter 'basket' was obviously a palm-leaf bucket or 'turlini'. Throughout the parley and exchange King's party occupied a whale-boat and a jolly-boat. Two points rise out of this conflict. Firstly, this knowledge of firearms is a further indication of possible conflict with Portuguese slave-raiders, for in speaking of changes suddenly thrust upon the Tiwi by newcomers, Hart, Pilling and Goodale refer to "the matchlock guns used by the Malays and probably the Portuguese". Mention is also made by them of how one could duck in time to avoid the charge when the flash of a matchlock or a flintlock was seen, just as the Tiwi did on Luxmore Head. Pilling himself simply states that at some time prior to 1818 the Tiwi became aware of the power of firearms.⁴⁷ The second point relates to the Tiwi's knowledge of barter and the desirability of metal implements such as axes. The Dutch could have traded with the Tiwi for artifacts or bush foods, exchanging axes, knives and other items. So could Macassan trepangers or Portuguese slave-raiders, if the latter did visit the islands.

It must be remembered that unless the Islanders had come into contact with Portuguese slave-raiders late in the eighteenth century it is doubtful whether the

generation of Tiwi confronting King had previously seen Europeans. They demonstrated no fear of the new-comers, while alternatively displaying hostility and requesting gifts of axes from King. As stated previously, one elderly lady stood in the sea, inviting the explorers to land, with her continued calling of 'Ven aca, Ven aca'. At one stage, King was forced to threaten one man with a club as he leapt through the water towards the boat, presumably in an attempt to seize a second tomahawk offered by King in exchange for the brass-bound theodolite stand. Some men leapt through the sea-water, in what King took to be a dance, while an armed party of Tiwi men was seen to be hiding near the beach, possibly waiting to ambush the Europeans if they ventured ashore. While acknowledging that the Tiwi 'men were more muscular and better formed than any we had before seen', King and his party 'were all thoroughly disgusted with them, and felt a degree of distrust that could not be conquered.'⁴⁸

Failing to retrieve the theodolite stand and the insect net, King sailed down Apsley Strait, proving, on 19 May, 1818, the insularity of the islands. Melville Island he named after Viscount Melville, First Lord of the Admiralty, while Bathurst Island was named in honour of the third Earl Bathurst, Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies, The Tiwi were not aware of the new names for their islands for approximately another ninety years.

The shoals at the southern entrance of Apsley Strait, which inhibit vessels other than small ones from entering the water-way from that end, forced King to sail back up the strait to its northern entrance. From there, on 22 May 1818, he continued his circumnavigation of Bathurst Island, moving around Malau (Maluwu) at the north-western end of the island. The Tiwi of Bathurst Island, like those of southern and eastern Melville Island, had not been exposed to the several Dutch expeditions and probably, in most areas, not to the Macassans as the bands of northern Melville Island had been. Neither van Delft's expedition nor that of Baudin had landed on Bathurst Island. Oral stories about foreign visitors to northern Melville Island in previous centuries would have been passed across the Tiwi Islands. However, King's party was, in all probability, the first group of Europeans to be seen by the people of Bathurst Island.

King established a wood-cutting camp at Port Hurd, to the east of Cape Helvetius. There on the evening of 26 May, a group of Tiwi, whom King took to be returning from a hunting excursion, came near King's camp. They concealed themselves until just before dark when they ranged themselves on the beach. King ordered a musket to be fired over their heads to deter any attack in the darkness. It is not clear whether such an attack was planned. Quite possibly the men were simply intrigued by these strangers. As the expedition prepared to sail next day, a group of Tiwi ran out of the bush into the sea signalling to the Europeans to land again and, like their confrères at Luxmore Head, made signs seeking axes. King having failed to respond, the Tiwi returned to the beach, picking up a chisel deliberately left for them on the stump of a tree felled by wood-cutters. As King anchored outside of Port Hurd his last view of the Tiwi was of the Islanders burning the abandoned wood camp. Completing his circumnavigation of Bathurst island, King came upon and named the Vernon Islands after the Duke of Clarence. He had surveyed all of the coastline of the Tiwi Islands apart from the south-east coast of Melville Island where navigational difficulties were encountered. His food and water supplies low, King sailed for Timor on 31 May, 1818.⁴⁹

The siting of early forts on the Cobourg Peninsula and Melville Island 'was due in no small measure to the detailed surveys' of King. Bearing in mind the high rise and fall of

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

the tide in Apsley Strait and the depth of the strait, King considered the area well suited for a settlement with facilities for docking vessels. King's surveys were useful when the British were looking to set up a settlement in the northern parts of New Holland through fear of the Dutch and the French, but settlement did not occur until 1824.

Until 1818 all visits to the Tiwi Islands by outsiders had been of a brief and temporary nature. The infrequency of such contacts no doubt contributed to the lack of any major discernible changes in the Islanders' culture and lifestyle. Throughout the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century, apart from the possession of a small number of metal tools which made work easier, their customary lifestyle continued, not disturbed to any large extent by visitors. However, the Tiwi had no way of knowing that King's visit would lead in a few years to a new and different category of visitors, those who sought to make their stay a permanent rather than a temporary one.

Everyday life of the Tiwi community in 1818 remained as politically and culturally strong as it had apparently been for almost 200 years since the first recorded visit by Europeans. During this time the occasional but fleeting contacts with the outside world gave the Islanders an awareness of other cultures, of the physical appearance and habits of the visitors, and of the types of goods they possessed. They also showed clearly what they did desire from the Europeans: steel tools, especially axes. This desire was to be fervently demonstrated during the period of the British presence at Fort Dundas.

¹ Casey, D.A. and Massola, A., *The Derivation of the Melville and Bathurst Islands Burial Posts*, National Museum of Victoria Memoirs, Vol. 22, part 9, 25 October, 1957, p. 1; see also Spencer, 1914a, 228-229. Words in italics are those of the author.

² Casey and Massola, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Seligman, C.G., "The Erection of a Dubu". In *Antiquity*, Vol. 4, 1930, pp. 478-480.

³ Worms, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴ King, Margaret, *Eden to Paradise*, London: The Travel Book Club, 1963, p. 167.

⁵ McCarthy, F.D., "Aboriginal Australian Material Culture: Causative Factors in its Composition", part 2. In *Mankind*, Vol. 2, No. 9, 1940, p. 305.

⁶ Berndt and Berndt, *op. cit.*, pp. 1, 12, 20, 22, 101-102, 372, 416, 424-425; Capell, A., "Early Indonesian Contacts With North Australia". In *Journal of the Oriental Society of Australia*, 3, 1965, pp. 67-75; McCarthy (1953), *op. cit.*, pp. 243-261; McCarthy, F.D., "Aboriginal Australian material culture: Causative factors in its composition," parts 1 & 2, *Mankind*, 2 (8 & 9), May & October, 1940, pp. 241-269, 294-320; McCarthy (1939), *op. cit.*, pp. 191-192; Davidson, D.S., "The Geographical Distribution Theory and Australian Culture". In *Mankind*, 2(3), 1937, pp. 61-63; McCarthy, F.D., "The Geographical Distribution Theory and Australian Material Culture". In *Mankind*, 2(1), 1936, pp. 13-16; Davidson, D.S., "Australian Spear-traits and their Derivations". In *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 43, 1934, pp. 41-72, 143-162, all exemplify this discussion.

⁷ Spencer, 1914a, pp. 228-229.

⁸ McCarthy (1940), *op. cit.*, pp. 306-307; McCarthy, F.D., "Aboriginal Australian Material Culture: Causative Factors in its Composition", part 1. In *Mankind*, 2(8), 1940, p. 259; McCarthy (1939), *op. cit.*, p. 191.

⁹ Worms, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰ Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 27; McIntyre, K.G., *The Secret Discovery of Australia*, Medindie (Adelaide): Souvenir Press, 1977, p. 315. McIntyre's theory about "the Portuguese discovery of Australia" led to debate among historians.

- ¹¹ Heeres, J.E., *The Part Borne by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia 1606-1765*, London: Luzac and Co., 1899, p. 67. Collingridge, George, *The Discovery of Australia*, 2nd edition (facsimile), Gladesville: Golden Press, 1983, p. 277, states that Pieterszoon explored 30 miles of the coast.
- ¹² Knight, John M., *The Northern Territory Coast*, Occasional Papers No. 29, Darwin: State Library of the Northern Territory, 1992, p. 5; Heeres, *op. cit.*, p. viii; Parsons, H.A., *The Truth About the Northern Territory*, Adelaide: Hussey and Gillingham, 1907, p. 4. See also Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
- ¹³ Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
- ¹⁴ Williams, G. and Frost, A., *Terra Australis to Australia*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, maps at pp. 101 and 104. Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 14; Heeres, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88; Halls, Chris, "The Voyage of Martin van Delft - An Account of Early Exploration by Sea of the Northern Territory". In *The Territorian*, Darwin, April, 1967, p. 18.
- ¹⁵ Heeres, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
- ¹⁶ Forrest, p. 12-15, Halls, p. 18; Cape Helvetius is in fact towards the south-west corner of Bathurst Island, not to the north-west. Forrest bases his localities on a 1705 map of the region, a copy of which is included in Heeres, *op. cit.*, p. unnumbered. This map is difficult to decipher. Hart, Pilling and Goodale, p. 105; Powell, p. 32.
- ¹⁷ Major, R.H. *Early Voyages to Terra Australis, Now Called Australia*, Adelaide: Australian Heritage Press, 1963, p. 126; Halls, *op. cit.*, considers Roseboom's Bay to most likely be Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsula.
- ¹⁸ Major, *op. cit.*, p.126; Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 15, identifies the two points as the entrance to Shark Bay on Melville Island's north coast. Karslake Island is located near the entrance to Shark Bay. There are no two islands close to each other along the coastline of Melville Island as indicated in the Batavia Castle report of 6 October, 1705. Halls, *op. cit.*, p. 18, suggests that van Delft named Melville and Bathurst Islands "Goede Hoop" and "Kuijle Eijlandt" (sic).
- ¹⁹ Singe, John, *The Torres Strait: People and History*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 16-17; Joy, William, *The Explorers*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1971, pp. 10-12;
- ²⁰ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 105; Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
- ²¹ Major, *op. cit.*, p. 127.
- ²² Halls, *op. cit.*, p. 18. There are no chiefs in Tiwi society. Halls states that the incident occurred at the entrance to Apsley Strait.
- ²³ Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
- ²⁴ Forrest, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-17; Halls, *op. cit.*, p. 18; Major, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-128.
- ²⁵ Major, *op. cit.*, p. 127. What van Delft himself thought about the attack is unknown as his journal and papers were confiscated by local authorities when van Delft died at Macassar on 8 August, 1705.
- ²⁶ Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- ²⁷ Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
- ²⁸ Forrest, *op. cit.*, p. 17, includes in his account of van Delft's visit to the Tiwi Islands an incident on 14 June, 1705, when members of the expedition met 500 Aborigines at a camp several miles inland from the coast. Halls, *op. cit.*, p. 19, locates this incident near Mountnorris Bay on the northern coast of Arnhem Land, which, due to the date of the happening and the number of Aborigines involved, appears to be more accurate. Major, *op. cit.*, p. 128, refers to the meeting, but the location is not given. The event is not referred to in other writings on van Delft's visit to the Tiwi Islands
- ²⁹ Heeres, *op. cit.*, p. viii, refers to van Delft's chart.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ³⁰ Forrest, p. 18.
- ³¹ Earl (1853), *op. cit.*, p. 210. Earl gained this information on a visit to Timor about 1840.
- ³² James, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.
- ³³ Stanley, Owen, *An Aboriginal Economy: Nguiu, Northern Territory*, Darwin: Australian National University North Australia Research Unit, 1983, p. 1.
- ³⁴ Pilling, *op. cit.*, p. 40; Pilling, A.R., *Genetic Change among the Tiwi of North Australia*, Paper Read at the 10th Pacific Science Congress, Hawaii, 1961, p. 2.
- ³⁵ Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
- ³⁶ King, P.P. *op. cit.*, p. 113; Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 155-156. McIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 85, states that “Ven aca” is clearly the Portuguese imperative “Venha-ca” meaning “Come here!”.
- ³⁷ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 155; Searcy, A. *In Australian Tropics*, London and Melbourne: George Robertson, 1909, p.46. The term “Malay” referred to Indonesian people, including Macassans, as well as the inhabitants of Malaya.
- ³⁸ Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁰ Harris, *op. cit.*, pp. 116-117.
- ⁴¹ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106.
- ⁴² James, *op. cit.*, p. 15-16; Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 52; Mulvaney, D.J., *The Prehistory of Australia*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1969, p. 36 are examples of such authors.
- ⁴³ Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-41; Bauer, *op. cit.*, p. 27; Clune, *op. cit.*, p. 11; King, *op. cit.*, p. 122. Baudin, N.T., *The Journal of Post Captain Nicolas Baudin, Commander-in-Chief of the Corvettes ‘Geographe’ and ‘Naturaliste’, assigned by order of the government to a voyage of discovery*, translated from the French by Christine Cornell, Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1974, does not refer to Bathurst Island. Baudin could have thought he was surveying part of the mainland.
- ⁴⁴ King, P.P. *op. cit.*, pp. 98-123.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁶ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*; Pilling, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
- ⁴⁸ King, P.P. *op. cit.*, pp 98-123 is the main reference for these descriptions of his travels.
- ⁴⁹ King, P.P. *op. cit.*, pp. 98-123, is the main reference for my description of his survey of the islands.

CHAPTER THREE

Fort Dundas - Settlement of Doom

(1824 -1829)

Tiwi society in the early 1820s was much as it had been 200 years earlier. Intermittent exposure to outside cultures had had only limited impact on the Islanders' lifestyle. The Tiwi now had a knowledge of metal tools, some understanding of primitive firearms, an awareness of the superiority of the visitors' material culture and an acquaintance with a few Portuguese words. Possibly slave-raids had led to a reduction in the male population, and some fear of, and aggression towards, foreigners. One incident in the brief contact with King had already entered the oral history of the Tiwi. No documented record exists of any visitors to the Tiwi Islands between 1818 and 1824, although trepang and trochus fishermen from the Indonesian Archipelago may have had some form of intercourse with the Islanders during this time.

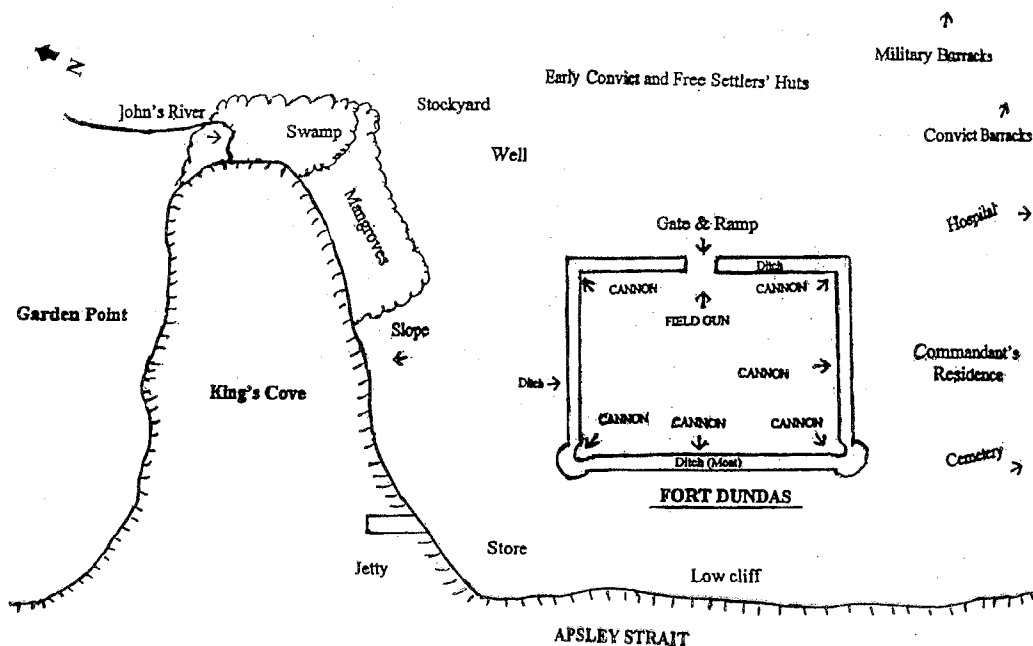
A few years after King's visit, British interest in the Tiwi Islands brought about a new phase in the unwritten annals of the Tiwi. Although this interest was virtually unannounced in the New South Wales press, its impact on Tiwi history was a major one, remembered to this day through dance, song, mime and oral history. For the Tiwi it was to be the first prolonged contact with an outside people. Moreover, it was to be a period of mistrust, confrontation and violence. The conflict that occurred on Melville Island in the 1820s led to a large amount of misinformation and exaggeration on the part of various authors well into the twentieth century. A number of secondary resources on this era in Islander ethnohistory are unreliable in various ways, as are most tertiary sources, contributing to the mystique of the Tiwi. In reality, the Islanders maintained their independence to the best of their capability, within their cultural restrictions.

Early in the nineteenth century there was some concern in Britain about the expansion of Dutch interests in the East India Archipelago, together with a desire for a share of the trade in that locality. In addition, there was a perceived need to try to exclude the French from moving into the region. The British Government therefore decided to claim and occupy the Cobourg Peninsula and the Tiwi Islands. Captain John Gordon Bremer, R. N., was appointed to establish two settlements in the region. Frontier warfare in New South Wales did not permit the transfer of enough troops to garrison two posts, however, so Bremer chose to occupy only Melville Island.¹ On 26 September 1824, after taking possession of "the North Coast of New Holland (or Australia)" at Port Essington, Bremer arrived off Melville Island with three vessels, H.M.S. *Tamar*, the *Countess of Harcourt* and the *Lady Nelson*.² By 29 September the islands were claimed and a fort commenced at Point Barlow (Punata to the Tiwi) on Apsley Strait and to the south of

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Luxmoore Head. A garden was started at Garden Point (Pularumpi) nearby. In a ceremony held on 21 October 1824 the post was named Fort Dundas, Dundas being one of the names of Lord Melville, Head of the Board of Admiralty.³ The Royal salute, fired from cannon on the uncompleted fort, must have brought a reaction from any Tiwi within hearing distance. While island oral history does not record the reaction of the Tiwi to the sound of the cannon they may have thought that the noise was attributed to Pumwanyinga, the female voice of thunder.

While work on the settlement progressed, the neighbouring country was explored, the strait surveyed and game sought for meat. Where were the Tiwi during this time? The available primary material related to this era in Tiwi ethnohistory tells the story from a European perspective. Islander memories of the this inter-cultural contact are not expansive. At this distance in time there is no way of clarifying for certain whether any of the Islanders sighted the ships when they arrived in Apsley Strait. One Tiwi dance mimics a ship arriving at Fort Dundas and men rowing ashore. In the 1960s, this was claimed to be a representation of the arrival of the first Englishmen at Punata. It is difficult to say whether the Tiwi did observe the arrival of the first convoy, or created their dance as a result of viewing a ship or ships arriving at Melville Island at a later date. The British had not seen any Tiwi until 25 October 1824, although their handiwork had been visible for weeks. 'Native fires' were seen when the ships first arrived at the islands. Initially the fires appeared to be detached from each other, but gradually they moved along Bathurst and Melville Islands towards the area of the fort. Ennis felt that 'the natives were endeavouring to surround us in a body'.⁴ Roe took the fires to be a



MAP 7

FORT DUNDAS AND ITS ENVIRONS
Not drawn to scale. Only main facilities indicated.

Refs. Map: *The British Settlement of Fort Dundas on Melville Island*, 24 April 1827; Crosby (1978); Field studies, John Morris, 1960-1963.

means of signalling.⁵ The Tiwi custom of '*kimirrakini*' or lighting fires to drive out game and to ensure a regrowth of vegetation in the coming wet season (*'jamutakari'*) usually practised by the various groups travelling through their respective 'countries' could have been the reason. Tiwi oral history does not include mention of any attempts to burn out the British as it surely would had this been the case. Ennis' error in believing that the Islanders were trying to burn out the British is understandable given his lack of experience of firestick farming practises.

A 'coloured' convict, one of three helping to build the settlement, may have seen the Tiwi before 25 October, but this is not certain. This man, Lorraine, was unable to return to the fort after he and a soldier ate a toxic fruit while hunting and was not seen again. Whether he died of illness or was killed by the Tiwi is a matter of conjecture. Ennis referred to him as "the black prisoner", while Roe wrote of him as "a convict negro" and "the black man".⁶ What must the Tiwi have thought of the 'coloured' convicts working with the '*murrintawi*' (people with white skins)? Did the Islanders still consider Europeans to be ghosts after the long period of intermittent contacts with representatives of European cultures. And what did they make of white women? The Islanders first saw European women in the 1820s, when a small number of wives lived in the new military station over different periods. Furthermore, given the social and territorial structures of the Tiwi and the fact that, as far as can be ascertained, none of the British exploration parties had moved relatively far from the coastlines of the islands, there were still a large number of Tiwi who had not sighted or met a European. Their knowledge of these newcomers would have been wholly second hand, coming through stories passed on from those Islanders who had encountered one or another of the Dutch or British arrivals, or had possibly escaped from the alleged slave raids by the Portuguese. Like some of the Aborigines who came into contact with Europeans on the remote frontier, the Tiwi could initially have been afraid of firearms. It can be safely suggested there would have been Tiwi who displayed consternation when they did eventually encounter the British in the vicinity of Fort Dundas.

The recorded history of contact between the Tiwi and the British garrison began badly on 25 October with two separate and distinct incidents occurring on that day. The relationships that later followed were tainted by this poor start and always included elements of suspicion and violence. These were not to be resolved during the life of the settlement. In the first incident Bremer met a party of Tiwi at the mouth of a small river on Bathurst Island. As far as is recorded, no Europeans had previously visited this part of the island, 'the country' of Malau (Malawu). Although aggressive and peace-seeking in turn, the ten Tiwi men were bewildered and agitated by their encounter with the exploration party, even when offered presents.⁷ Intercourse Point, the site of this meeting, is not far south of Luxmore Head, the scene of the clash between a group of Tiwi and King's party six years earlier. Given the periodical meetings of the Tiwi for ceremonies and to organise raiding parties in the cases of feuds and open battles, it is inconceivable that the Malauila would not have been aware of what occurred in that incident and that the Munupula involved had demonstrated no fear of the white people (*murrintawi*). In this surprise meeting with Bremer the Malauila group displayed a somewhat different attitude. One can postulate that as the meeting between the British and the Malauila was unexpected, the Islanders were unsettled by the incident. This event was later written about in a sensationalist manner adding to the public's misconception of the Tiwi by inaccurately describing the Malauila as "...holding the ten-

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

foot spears with Egyptian markings, five feet of sharpened barbs, and being “shock-headed” with “nose bones a foot long.”⁸

On the same day, two convicts were seized by the Tiwi, but not injured, near the settlement. The Tiwi attackers took their axes, but retreated before a detachment of soldiers who responded to the convicts’ alarm. The Islanders involved had probably been watching the convicts for some time and knew the value of axes.⁹ At Fort Wellington, founded on the mainland in 1827, friendly relations were eventually established with the local Iwaidja people, this friendly state of affairs enabling the peaceful occupation of the Port Essington settlement of Victoria in 1838. This was not the case on Melville Island. Amicable relations usually ended when the Aborigines in the area of each fort “...no doubt concerned about the failure of the foreigners to pay for their occupation of traditional lands, began taking highly prized axes, knives and sickles.”¹⁰ Perhaps the Aborigines did see the seizure of the tools as a form of compensation. But these items were in high demand by the Tiwi as tools and weapons, especially, as the use of such tools would make the production of grave posts and heavy barbed spears simpler and more refined. At Fort Dundas and, for some time, at Fort Wellington, the pilfering of various articles by Aborigines resulted in inter-racial friction as it did across the frontier. The occupation of the Tiwi Islands and the Cobourg Peninsula by an armed force without successful consultation with traditional owners could only lead to violence.

The British occupation of the Tiwi Islands was in a small way a reflection of what had occurred at Port Jackson in 1788. No official recognition was given of the Islanders’ traditional ownership of their islands, while Bremer, like Governor Phillip, was determined to win over the indigenous population into voluntary submission or to establish peace with it. In each instance reality was to prove stronger than motive. Soon after the seizure of the convicts Bremer and a military party met eighteen to twenty Tiwi men in the bush. The British offer of gifts was refused, the Islanders calling only for axes. Bremer gave them four axes, but the Tiwi refused to enter the settlement.¹¹ At no time during the life of Fort Dundas did the Tiwi voluntarily enter the settlement. They did raid the outskirts however. For the first time in their long history the Tiwi were confronted with European buildings, in addition to white people in large numbers. Moreover, these newcomers, perceived as intruders, gave no indication of departing from the land seen by the Tiwi as belonging to them. The Tiwi had no understanding of the ceremonial claiming of their islands by the British or how this could affect them. They would, however, have understood the British action in appropriating certain of the islands’ resources, the wallabies and sea foods, timber and stone for building, and the fresh water supply at Johns River, near the fort. They also used other creeks when cutting timber. We do not know how the Tiwi viewed the clearing of a large area of land for the settlement and garden. Island women were seen only on a few occasions, and at no time near the fort, indicating a possible lack of trust in European men.

Although the islands contained certain sites related to the Creation period or other figures in the Tiwi cosmos, secret ceremonial grounds did not exist as they did elsewhere in indigenous Australia. Tiwi spiritual belief and activity did not require localities specifically reserved for religious ritual. Therefore, intrusion on to such grounds was not a reason for Tiwi enmity. Likewise, there was little possibility that the misuse of Islander women was a cause, as the women were not seen in the vicinity of the settlement. An unsatisfied desire for metal tools was obviously one reason. Like

elsewhere in Australia the main reason for hostility was the growing realisation that, unlike previous visitors, these Europeans had no intention of leaving. In most cases of frontier violence, "...conflict seems to have arisen more frequently from competing use of land rather than the trespass as such."¹² The Tiwi may also have seen the British taking part of their food supply through the newcomers' hunting and fishing activities. Could the Islanders' aggression result from a perceived competition for resources, as well as for land? The Tiwi did spear and drive off some stock. And, the impact on the food supply at Fort Dundas would have been a serious one. The taking and, presumably the killing, of the stock was not seen by the British as a form of defence of the Tiwi's land or retaliation for Islander stock foods being used by the British.

A further confrontation over stolen tools took place on 27 November 1824, during which Bremer saw a light-skinned man, probably a Malay or an Indonesian, with the Tiwi.¹³ Following this meeting, during which the British were on the alert, Bremer issued an instruction that firearms were to be used against the Islanders only in cases of necessity. This attempt to avoid any more conflict proved to be futile. Writing of the aggressive attitude of the Tiwi towards the British, Roe reported that

...after a lapse of a week [they] began open depredations on every one they met, taking the axes and knives and sickles of those men who were in the woods preparing materials for building, and poisoning their spears on the least symptom of resistance.¹⁴

From the indigenous point of view Aboriginal actions on the frontier were genuine acts of war designed to repel the intruders on their land. In response to the Islanders' aggression armed guards were now sent out with each party, a musket being fired over the heads of attacking Tiwi whenever, and after, spears were thrown at a party. This did not deter the Tiwi even when, during three simultaneous attacks upon separate groups of soldiers on 30 October 1824, a "chief" was shot by direct gun fire.¹⁵

Despite the unfriendly attitude of the Tiwi, Bremer was impressed by their speed and activity, their precision with the '*murukuwunga*' or throwing stick, and aspects of their culture.¹⁶ Nevertheless, in making the fort as strong as possible, Bremer had in mind not only the "treachery" of the Malays who were expected to visit the settlement, but also "much hostility expected from the Natives".¹⁷ The stockade, 75 yards (68.5 metres) long and 50 yards (45.7 metres) wide, was substantial, being composed of huge logs "in layers five feet thick at the base" laid on foundations of rock. It measured six feet (1.8 metres) in height, topping a dry moat 10 feet (3.04 metres) deep and 15 feet (4.5 metres) wide. The fort was equipped with seven cannon, and contained the officers' quarters and a magazine. It also contained space for permanent military barracks. Beyond the fort stood the settlement housing the soldiers, free settlers and convicts. Later writers had differing views on the efficiency of the fort. Robinson and York argued that, "because the fort was so heavily defended by cannon and shot, the Aboriginal warriors could not hope to over-run it."¹⁸ In contrast Lockwood postulates that "the modern fort, armed with powder and shot, ...became besieged by primitive men whose weapons were cut from the bush."¹⁹ In fact the Tiwi social structure and fighting techniques discouraged a large scale attack upon the settlement.

Bremer's departure on 13 November 1824 left Captain Maurice Barlow as commandant of the settlement, which contained approximately 120 persons.²⁰ The population included two lieutenants, a military surgeon, 30 marines, 22 soldiers of the 3rd

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Regiment, about 47 convicts, five free male settlers, four women and four children, as well as the captain and 12 seamen of the *Lady Nelson*, the vessel attached to the fort.²¹ One of the free settlers was William Barnes, who hoped to open up trade with the Portuguese and Dutch controlled islands of the Indonesian Archipelago. But the British made no attempt to trade with the Tiwi, even when food supplies were low at the fort. Apart from timber and bark for construction, and pandanus leaves for weaving into mats, baskets, hats and the like, the Islanders could have offered sea foods and a certain amount of wallaby meat. If the early settlements in south-eastern Australia are any example, wallaby and possum skins could have been traded from the Tiwi for making into articles of clothing, bedding and covers. And the Tiwi made their desire for metal tools well known thus offering a trading opportunity. Any such trade would have required the establishment of peaceful relationships between the two cultures. Despite some efforts being made by Barlow and his successor Major Campbell, all were unsuccessful. The extent of these can be gauged by official reports and a paper read by Campbell in later years, but it would appear from these sources only weak overtures were made. Captain Hartley, the last commandant (1828 to 1829), appears to have been too despondent with his command to seek to communicate with the Islanders at all.

Some writers argued that “the Tiwi were unimpressed by the visitors and encouraged their departure by frequent attacks and by stealing everything not locked away.” In truth, as various reports from the fort indicate, the guerrilla-style attacks, while impeding the progress of the settlement, did not occur throughout the full year. From an ethnological point of view, there are reasons for this, related to the Tiwi’s obligations to various customary events. In the early months of each year the Islanders attended initiation and ‘*kulama*’ or yam increase ceremonies.²² Small funerals and duels were possible events on the Tiwi calendar for the end of the wet season (‘*jamutakari*’) and the early part of the dry season (‘*kimirrakinari*’). The ‘*kimirrakinari*’ was the time not only for the movement of family units across the various “countries” but also for participation in the mortuary rites (‘*pukumani*’ or ‘*pukumwani*’) for “big men” and for feuds when social laws were transgressed.²³ This irregularity was considered to be “a discontinuous campaign of harassment (sic) against the settlers.”²⁴

The Islanders took advantage of the closeness of the bush to parts of the settlement, launching spears into outlying buildings, as well as the saw-pits about a mile (1.6 kms) from the settlement. Due to this hostility and the nature of the country, exploration of the islands was mainly confined to coastal sea travels.²⁵ The situation was perceived to be serious enough for convicts and ticket-of-leave men to be armed when going to the outskirts of the settlement or into the bush.²⁶ At the same time, Barlow, who considered the Tiwi to be timid and not to be numerous, hoped to establish friendly relations with them by treating them with kindness.²⁷ The failure of the British to move out across the islands in an effort to contact the Tiwi is illustrated by Barlow’s report that “the natives” were not numerous, and he supposed them to live mainly on fish as the “kangaroos” were scarce and small in size. Barlow had no understanding of the Islanders’ social and territorial organisation or why he saw only a relatively few Tiwi in the vicinity of the fort. The majority of the Islanders, especially the women, children and old men, remained in their own countries, free, to a great extent, of intrusion by the *murrintarni*. The inability of Tiwi and British to easily understand each other was a serious flaw in the efforts of Barlow and Campbell to bring about inter-cultural peace. And no language of contact emerged

**FROM PORT AND LOCAL REGULATIONS FOR
MELVILLE ISLAND, 1 OCTOBER 1826**

RULES TO BE OBSERVED WHEN AT ANCHOR OR IN HARBOUR

- Article 13 No Spirits, Wine, Beer, or other Liquor of like kind, is to be sold, or given, on any account or Pretext, from on board, to any of the original Natives of the Country; and any personal injury, violence, or insult whatever offered or done to the Male or Female Natives, will expose to prosecution, and will be punished in like manner and degree as in the case of any European or any other of His Majesty's subjects in like respect.

Fig. 5 *Source: H.R.A., Vol. 6, p. 671, Campbell to Macleay, Enclosure M, No. 1, 10/10/1826*

**FROM EXTRA LOCAL REGULATIONS - FORT DUNDAS
1 OCTOBER 1826**

RELATING TO VESSELS ARRIVING AT MELVILLE ISLAND

- No. 9 Strangers are cautioned against Venturing into the Swamps or Woods in any part of Bathurst Island or Melville Island, as, owing to the Hostility and Treacherous cunning of the Natives, it would be highly imprudent to trust themselves among them unarmed or in small numbers. It is the wish of Government to cultivate their friendship if possible, and all chance of coming into collision with them is strictly forbidden; And any personal injury, violence or insult whatever, offered to the Natives, will expose to prosecution and be punished in like Manner and degree as in the case of Europeans or any other of His Majesty's Subjects.

Fig. 6 *Source: H.R.A., Vol. 6, p. 673, Campbell to Macleay, Enclosure M, No. 1, 10/10/1826*

at Fort Dundas, evidence of the poor relationship that existed between the two diverse cultural groups.²⁸ The capture of a "lad" with Malay features in 1825 failed to improve the situation, as the prisoner escaped back into the bush after three or four days' detention.²⁹ Campbell considered it probable that the youth had been originally captured from a Malay prau (prow), but he could have been a willing guest. Barlow

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

attempted to bring peace to the islands, but despite his best intentions, he was hampered by his lack of knowledge. Both Barlow and Campbell were also frustrated by their inability to communicate with the Tiwi for without a means of communication their best intentions could not be conveyed.

The settlement was struck a serious blow in 1825 when two vessels, the *Lady Nelson* and the *Stedcombe*, failed to return from voyages to Timor and the East Indies to purchase supplies and buffalo for the fort. The crew of the *Lady Nelson* were not murdered by the Tiwi, as one source alleges, but by pirates.³⁰ The sole survivor of the *Stedcombe*, Joseph Forbes ("Timor Joe") was rescued from slavery on Timor Laut by the *Essington* on the 31 March 1839.³¹ The impact on those remaining on the island was severe and caused considerable anxiety.

Barlow's futile efforts to placate the Tiwi were carried on by Brevet Major John Campbell who succeeded him on 19 September 1826. Both officers were men of their time, failing to recognise and appreciate the cause of the aggressiveness. Campbell was the first European to record his observations of the Islanders at any length, although even these are somewhat superficial. He wrote of the Tiwi in terms of their being an enemy and in an ethnocentric mode, referring to their "treacherous cunning" and "treacherous and hostile disposition", and of their being "in a state of barbarous ignorance".³² Regulations declared by Campbell on 1 October 1826 were in part designed to protect the Islanders from the effects of alcohol and from injury or insult. The regulations also forbade the use of firearms against the Tiwi unless the safety of Europeans was threatened.³³ In the south-east of the continent alcohol had already caused serious social and health problems for Aborigines residing in settled parts of the several colonies. The authorities in the colonies had done nothing to protect the Aborigines from indiscriminate shootings by settlers who saw such actions as part of the effort to clear their holdings of the traditional land-owners. Fortunately for the Tiwi, geographical restrictions, the military nature of the post, and the centralised structure of the settlement, all worked together to ensure that the regulations were obeyed.

Despite Campbell's efforts the conflict around Fort Dundas reached new heights in 1827. The situation, though critical, was not as serious as has been depicted by some authors. Grassby and Hill claim that

*By 1827 (the Tiwi) had forced the garrison to stay within its walls. Soldiers moving outside the fort did so in battle array; those on guard duty were often picked off by marksmen with spears. The Tiwi's military tactics were sophisticated, effectively putting the fort under siege.*³⁴

Again, in the assessment of Robinson and York, "by 1827, the tide of battle was moving rapidly in (the Tiwi's) favour, with the colonialists confined to the Fort and its immediate surrounds."³⁵ Grassby and Hill, as well as Robinson and York, had no documentary evidence to support these claims but they added to the Tiwi's legendary status as warriors.

Although the Tiwi sometimes allowed Europeans to pass unmolested through their extended lines, Campbell was forced to acknowledge that the Islanders remained "...until the last day distrustful, if not even determinedly hostile."³⁶ They were, he felt, "...revengeful, prone to stealing, and in their attempts to commit depredations show excessive cunning, dexterity, arrangement, enterprise and courage". Campbell also noted that the Tiwi produced an "even hideous appearance." by painting their persons

**FROM PORT AND LOCAL REGULATIONS FOR
MELVILLE ISLAND, 1 OCTOBER 1826**

REGULATIONS RESPECTING THE NATIVES, AND THE CARRYING OF FIRE ARMS

- 1st Those men, who may be entrusted with Arms for their personal protection when working at a distance from the settlement, are on no account to make use of those Arms unless they are actually assaulted by the Natives and firing (sic) at them becomes unavoidable for their personal safety.
- 2nd One man of every party employed in the Forest or at the saw pit is to be posted as Sentry, and, should the Natives be observed approaching in any number more numerous than the party, they will quit their work and leisurely return to the settlement and report what they have observed to the overseer.
- 3rd A Minute investigation of every transaction or intercourse, that may at any time take place with the Natives, will be thoroughly examined into; and, should any unwarranted violence appear to have been offered to the Natives, or any unnecessary quitting of Work take place from false pretences, the offenders shall be punished either in a most summary manner, or, if the case is of an aggravated nature, the law of England with regard to similar offences against any of His Majesty's Subjects will be rigidly enforced.
- 4th Every individual of this settlement is hereby to know that the Natives are to be treated in a freindly (sic) manner as far as is possible; and, when they approach the settlement, they are only to be communicated with in the open and clear ground, and none are to follow them into the standing Timber.
- 5th The Arms served out for the protection of the workman are to be inspected every evening at sunset by the Acting Engineer, and then deposit in the Guard House. The Engineer will see that they are in good Order and observe whether they have been fired out of or not; each stand of Arms is accompanied by a Tin Cartridge box containing Two rounds of spare cartridge; this is also to be inspected and deposited with the Arms. At day light, the Overseer will receive the Arms from the Guard House and issue them to the working parties as is necessary.

Fig. 7 Source: *H.R.A., Vol. 6, p. 676, Campbell to Macleay, Enclosure M, No. 1, 10/10/1826*

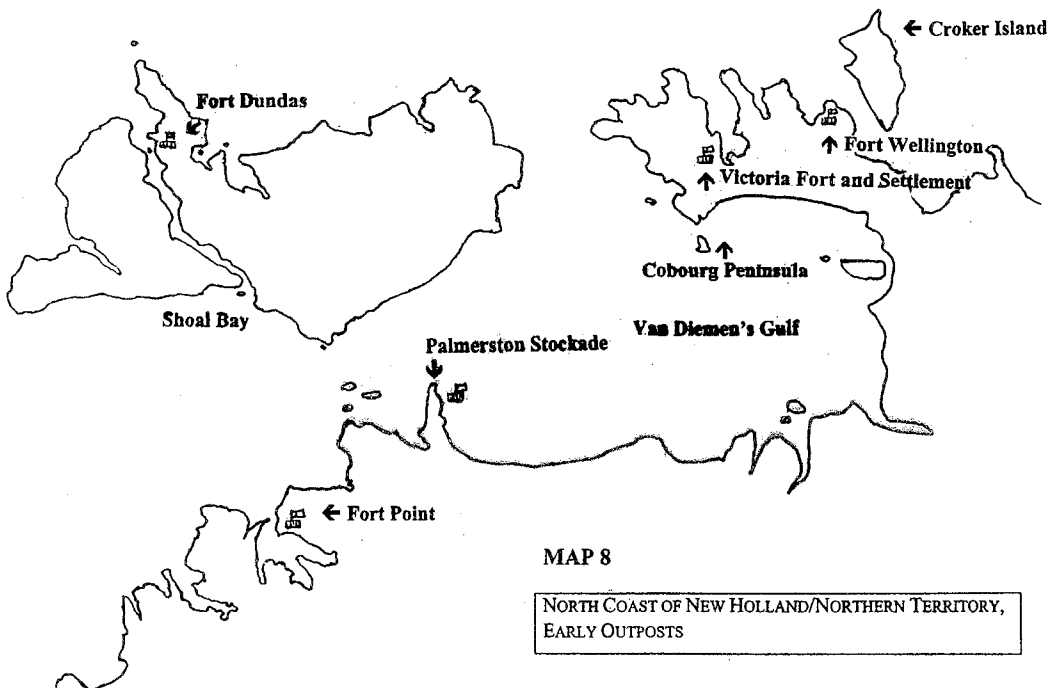
when involved in mischief or open hostilities. Painted or not, the Tiwi launched a campaign of destruction during the dry season of 1827, easily avoiding sentries

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

stationed at strategic locations. Hay-stacks were fired, pigs speared, fences demolished and washing stolen from a clothes-line at the hospital. The statement by Robinson and York that "...weekly, often daily, attacks were made upon the aggressor forces which, by this stage, were totally harassed and bedraggled", although somewhat exaggerated, is confirmed by Campbell's report that the Tiwi "...committed some daring depredations both by day light and during the night", so that even close to the settlement the workmen were "...kept in a constant state of alarm."³⁷ In pursuing a group of Tiwi on Apsley Strait Campbell captured a canoe 20 feet (6.09 metres) in length, but he later ordered that a village, abandoned as soldiers approached it, be left intact.³⁸ Campbell also met with a party of Tiwi, during which one of the Islanders mimicked a person struggling to escape an enemy and being hanged.³⁹ This was taken to be evidence of past raids on the Tiwi by an outside force such as Portuguese slavers, but the British still failed to make any connection with Tiwi hostility and their past experiences. The convicts, those most at risk, were constantly in fear.

During the last week of September an incident occurred which has become part of Tiwi oral history. Campbell's report states simply,

A few days ago I intercepted a party of these audacious Blacks going to attack some Men sawing timber; one of them was made prisoner, and is now doing well in Hospital, where he was sent on account of some wounds he received by his Stubborn resistance when taken; I intend detaining him, and shall endeavour to make him of some use to us.⁴⁰



The man, described by Campbell as “...one of these savages”, was held prisoner for several weeks during which much was learnt of the character of the Tiwi.⁴¹ The Tiwi account of the incident is more dramatic. A group of Tiwi on their way to obtain fresh water clashed with soldiers escorting a water party going to the same place, presumably Johns River, which was in reality a small creek. Keripu, a small Tiwi boy, was wounded and Tampu (Tambu) Tipungwuti, a “big man” or leader, was captured. After treatment in the settlement hospital Tampu was held in chains in a dry well which was pointed out to me by people from Garden Point Mission, on Melville Island, in 1960. One day, Tiwi hiding nearby saw Tampu marched at bayonet point to a funeral. That evening two Englishmen, Dr. John Gold and store keeper John Green were speared in an act of revenge for Tampu’s capture. Tampu then escaped by canoe to Malau (Malawu).⁴² Oral history offers two versions of how Tampu was able to escape. One holds that he was strong enough to break the chains and slip away. In the second version Tampu refused to eat until he was thin enough to slip out of his chains.⁴³ The re-enactment of Tampu bent over and shuffling in chains was observed on several occasions, in the 1960s, as part of Tiwi storytelling.

The killing of Gold and Green occurred on 2 November 1827 during the absence of Campbell at Fort Wellington on the Cobourg Peninsula.⁴⁴ Sophia Hicks, aged 23, the wife of Lieutenant William Hicks, R. N., master of the *Mary Elizabeth*, had died at Fort Dundas and was buried on 2 November.⁴⁵ Among the mourners were Gold and Green. No mention of Tampu attending the funeral appears in the records. That evening, near sunset, Gold and Green left the fort, unarmed, to go for a walk. Both men were brutally killed by the Tiwi, leaving the settlement without a doctor. Green’s body was located immediately after the attack, while Gold’s remains were found next morning.⁴⁶ So serious were Dr. Gold’s injuries, in particular, that in officially summing up at the enquiry into the deaths, Lieutenant Hicks declared “...from every circumstance I should fear he had died very hard.”⁴⁷ Campbell learnt of the deaths upon his return from Fort Wellington on 5 November 1827. Reporting on the inquiry into the killings, Campbell wrote,

*From the many instances of the conduct of the Natives, in showing a determination to do violence, and from their well known treacherous and hostile disposition, I had every caution to protect every individual of the Settlement against receiving any injury.*⁴⁸

In Sydney Governor Darling responded to the feeling of danger and uneasiness at Forts Dundas and Wellington by writing to the Secretary of State of the need to strengthen both garrisons. He considered that while the Iwaidja around Fort Wellington and the Tiwi dispersed quickly before firearms, “they are always at hand to attack Individuals, keeping as appears constantly in the neighbourhood of the Settlements.” Should there be an extensive sickness the occupants of the forts, he felt, were open to being “Massacred (sic) by the Natives.”⁴⁹ The truth is that, following the death of Green and Gold the Tiwi did not molest the Europeans in any way until May 1828, some several months later, although as late as April of that year Campbell still awaited an opportunity to show the Tiwi that murder must be avenged. This, he hoped,

*...will only be considered as doing justice and sanctioned as the sole means I have of chastizing Savages and convincing them that they cannot be allowed to commit murder with impunity.*⁵⁰

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Campbell's language is typical of nineteenth century British colonialism and of the frontier attitude in Australia. The killing of Europeans by indigenous Australians was seen as murder, while even pre-meditated shooting of Aborigines by Europeans was considered by many colonists to be legitimate. This view contrasts sharply with the official instructions given to Governor Phillip in 1787 on how the Aborigines were to be treated. Europeans who "wantonly destroy(ed)" Aborigines were to be brought to punishment "according to the degree of the offence", an order which was rarely carried out.⁵¹ Some colonists were more tolerant than others. Wilson wrote:

It is well known to every person who has had the slightest intercourse with savages, that they are invariably addicted to thieving. It is, therefore, not to be denied, that the natives committed many petty thefts; but the policy of being unnecessarily annoyed thereat, and the humanity of putting them to death for such offences, may be safely called in question.⁵²

Such comments appear to be indicative of the British view of the Tiwi. Overall the Major was not impressed by the conditions at the fort. Bethel states, "during the two years (of Campbell's tenure) eight soldiers and two convicts had died; two had been drowned and one died from spear wounds."⁵³ Before his departure from Fort Dundas on 18 May 1828, Campbell ordered details of soldiers to pursue and capture a group of Tiwi observed near the settlement. The pursuit went on for five hours, with the Tiwi evading their pursuers easily. Campbell departed without achieving his desire to make peace with the Tiwi and leaving a sorry record behind him.⁵⁴

Upon assuming command of the station Captain H. R. Hartley almost immediately found himself faced with a renewal of marauding and destructiveness by the Islanders. As it was "...unsafe to venture out of the camp unarmed", with various Europeans falling "...victims to the vengeance of these irritated and undiscerning savages."⁵⁵ Conditions soon worsened as illness reduced the strength of the garrison in September 1828.⁵⁶ The Tiwi continued to harass the British, although the extent of the Islanders' operations during the latter part of 1828 is not clear from the records. It is certain that the group or groups concerned continued to hover around the settlement, being troublesome and simply disappearing into jungle growth or the swamps whenever they were engaged by soldiers or other colonists.⁵⁷ On more than one occasion during this time the Tiwi might

Have been fired on with effect, but it would have been under circumstances which would have amounted or nearly so to deliberate slaughter, and the dictates of humanity averted from them that signal chastisement which on many accounts they must be admitted to merit.⁵⁸

The regulations enforced by Hartley and Campbell do not coincide with Wilson's statement that many Tiwi were put to death in a very unwarrantable manner.⁵⁹

Despite British belief in their racial superiority, Barker in particular showed that with tact and diplomacy the differences between the British and the Aborigines could be overcome to a degree where inter-racial conflict could be avoided. At Victoria settlement, through MacArthur's diplomacy, the punishing of Iwaidja culprits for theft did not lead to conflict there.⁶⁰ Unfortunately, while Bremer and, moreso, Campbell made attempts at peace-making in the Tiwi Islands they interpreted actions by indigenous people as crimes rather than as means of resisting intruders. The last commandant at Fort Dundas, Hartley, does not appear to have shown any respect for the Tiwi, nor did he make any serious attempt to bring peace to the islands:

By May, 1828, the fate of Fort Dundas was sealed when the Secretary of State for Colonies issued orders for the settlement to be abandoned and its personnel to be transferred to Fort Wellington.⁶¹ This instruction was confirmed by Murray on 1 November 1828.⁶² The transfer occurred in February and March 1829, the barque *Lucy Anne* being used to transport the soldiers and convicts to the Cobourg Peninsula. On 17 June 1829, Hartley reported that he and the “settlers” (presumably the free settlers) had been removed to Sydney.⁶³ Fort Dundas was simply abandoned and left to fall into ruin. Why did Fort Dundas fail? While this question remains the subject of much debate, the attitude of the Tiwi was undoubtedly a factor. A number of historians and writers portray the Tiwi as defeating the British or embellish the hostilities that occurred, exaggerating even further the degree of Tiwi might. While it is suggested that “...the Tiwi made the Europeans prisoners inside the walls of their own Fort”, one source went even further with the claim that many troops at the fort were massacred.⁶⁴ Robinson and York conclude that

By their fierce resistance, and the clever application of military tactics, the Aboriginal patriots made Fort Dundas a living hell for the aggressors who began to plead with their colonial masters to be taken away from ‘this vile island’. In 1829, Fort Dundas was ‘abandoned’, or more correctly, the British invaders were driven off, their tails between their legs, after their inglorious and thorough defeat.⁶⁵

Ernestine Hill is not so colourful in her opinion as to why the fort was abandoned, saying that this occurred “...in panic owing to the ferocity of the natives after many of the settlers had been speared and others wounded”. Hill also wrote that the soldiers at Fort Dundas had no hope against the spears of the Tiwi, commenting with some embellishment and inaccuracies,

At Melville Island the exiles battled along for four years, but the blacks were bad and trade was poor...men and women died of malaria or were murdered in the bush. At the burial service of the Commandant’s wife, two of the mourners at the graveside were speared from ambush, and the settlement was hastily abandoned in fear and despair.⁶⁶

Roberts claims that “the local Aborigines laid siege to the fort making a misery of the lives of the garrison, so in 1829 it was abandoned”, while Cook states that “owing to the hostility of the aborigines, it was found impracticable to continue the settlement, and it was finally abandoned in 1827 (sic)”.⁶⁷ Parsons sums up the situation at Fort Dundas, as one in which “the settlers experienced great difficulties with the natives, who were hostile and aggressive, and whose spears were too much for the firearms of those days.”⁶⁸ The exaggerated view of the ferocity of the Tiwi is summed up in one reference to “...the savages who, in 1831 (sic), routed - or at least imagined they routed - the British force...”,

In any case, the natives so pestered the immobile force of soldiers by ambushing them when they moved out of camp that the attempt to settle on the island was abandoned, and the settlement was transferred to Port Essington (sic).⁶⁹

The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia states that “the hostility of the Tiwi was such that (Fort Dundas) was abandoned in 1828 after an incident in which the assistant colonial surgeon and the commissary storekeeper were killed.”⁷⁰ Jarratt is more realistic about the effect of the Tiwi upon the British, commenting that “for some time, the failure

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

of Fort Dundas was put down to 'hostile Tiwis' but there is little evidence to support such claims.⁷¹ To what extent the British really feared the Tiwi is difficult to estimate although without a doubt there was deep concern for the safety of the settlement's occupants. In writing that seven Europeans had been speared, Meston felt that the wrong approach had been made to the Islanders by the British.⁷² Wilson, on the other hand, incorrectly stated that no record was kept of the number of deaths at the fort, but that "four or five" Europeans had been killed by the Tiwi, "...in consequence of coercive measures adopted towards them".⁷³ Allen merely points out that both Fort Dundas and Fort Wellington had been "...witness to bloody skirmishes with loss of life on both sides..."⁷⁴

By 1849 the positive attitude to the British occupation of the settlement and fort of Victoria on the Cobourg Peninsula contrasted with the situation at Fort Dundas and Fort Wellington, where in the latter's first year, "...mutual distrust prevailed under unsympathetic and uncomprehending commandants, who ruled by discipline and the gun".⁷⁵ Although a small number of Tiwi were killed or injured by gun-fire, the commanders at Fort Dundas were careful to ensure that no massacre of the native inhabitants took place as occurred elsewhere in Australia.

Apart from drawing up regulations deemed to protect the Tiwi from indiscriminate shootings and the effects of alcohol, attempts to distribute presents, and Campbell stopping the soldiers from damaging or plundering a village, the British did little to placate the Islanders. Realistically, Campbell's attempt to capture a Tiwi to use as an intermediary was the only real effort to create some sense of mutual understanding between the cultures. Many later writers have argued that the hostility of the Tiwi and the British reluctance to open friendly negotiations would have always led to the fort being abandoned.⁷⁶ Across the continent remote military posts were also established at Frederick's Town (later Albany), Fort Dumaresq/Settlement Point at Western Port, and Somerset on Cape York. In most cases these stations, like those of the north, were later abandoned. With the exception of Somerset, Fort Dundas was the one to suffer the greatest level of inter-cultural conflict.

The Tiwi saw the British departure from their islands as a retreat and felt their aggressive activities were successful.⁷⁷ However, it is not mentioned in Murray's initial instruction for the settlement to be abandoned.⁷⁸ His later letter confirming this instruction includes this as a serious factor, "...much annoyance is experienced from the Natives", one of several "very serious" "objections", the main ones being a lack of trade with the Malays, the tropical weather and the unhealthy circumstances.⁷⁹ Other writers added further factors but all recognised the effect of poor relations with the Tiwi. In Gee's opinion the settlement failed because the fort was incorrectly located, the settlement was off the normal sailing routes as vessels usually sailing to the north of Melville Island, navigation was difficult in Apsley Strait, practically no land exploration was carried out to ascertain the possibilities of the country, and the bad relations with the Tiwi. Expanding on the last point, Gee wrote

They were on bad terms with the natives from the start, and I do not think I am expressing too strongly when I say that it seems to me that by their want of tact, their timidity and their brutality (brutality probably caused by timidity) they aroused the bitter hostility which continues in these natives to this day. Only two aboriginal women were seen during the four year's stay of the garrison on the island - those who had any experience of natives will know what this means; and

up to the last, just before the place was abandoned, spears would be occasionally thrown into the hospital and huts by lurking natives.⁸⁰

Certainly the consistent show of hostility towards the British was a determining factor.⁸¹ There were other problems as well. The mangrove swamps and dense bush surrounding the station made life difficult. The tropical climate brought on illness, while the loneliness and monotony of life at the fort was a factor in its failure. Apsley Strait was out of the regular shipping track so few vessels visited and the Malay trade did not eventuate. The disappearance of the supply vessels *Lady Nelson* and *Stedcombe* gave further reason for concern.⁸² All of these factors combined to bring about the closure of the fort.

There is no way of knowing what the Tiwi thought as they entered and explored the settlement for the first time. Did they see themselves as being responsible for the departure of the British? The Islanders gained some knowledge of European material and social culture, and now possessed an unknown number of metal tools. Apart from the acts of violence there had been little physical contact between the cultures. How many of the Tiwi travelled to Munupi to glimpse the fort and its occupants is not known. Perhaps some bands stayed away from the fort due to fear, this again is unclear. If British reports are correct, the Tiwi men ensured that their women did not approach, or were not approached by, any of the European men. The Tiwi culture remained as it had been prior to 1824, apart from the addition of metal tools. Apart from the metal tools, the Tiwi also stole some linen from the hospital clothesline, a hand cart and some clothing but there is no record of them stealing a boat as several authors suggest.⁸³ After the Fort Dundas experience the Tiwi made no attempt to build more permanent housing or to domesticate animals.⁸⁴ Apart from dingoes the only large native animals on the islands were wallabies. The buffalo, released from their yards, were new and possibly terrifying to the Tiwi. They were not hunted, let alone domesticated, by the Tiwi. The Islanders' economic activities did not require more permanent accommodation, except perhaps in the wetter months of the year. Traditional housing was to remain part of the Tiwi tradition until they gradually settled on a more or less permanent basis at the mission in the twentieth century. On the matter of changes in traditional culture, there are claims that the Tiwi made metal spear-heads from the stolen tools.⁸⁵ This is conjecture. All authentic data indicates that the Tiwi have maintained the production of their wooden spears as such right up to the present time, apart from the modern concept of detachable metal prongs for fishing spears.

Several of the British officers recognised the Tiwi as distinct from mainland Aborigines in some way. For the Tiwi, the memory of Fort Dundas lives on in story, dance, song and mime, and, more recently, in an account of the era in booklets printed in the Tiwi language.⁸⁶ Mountford wrote of Fort Dundas,

Yet so vivid an impression did that garrison make on the minds of the aborigines that 125 years later they were able to tell us about men who wore red clothes and large shiny buttons and who made loud noises (cannon). They knew that men in dark clothes (the convicts) did all the work. It seems incredible that the detailed knowledge of such a brief settlement could have persisted for so long in the tribal memory.⁸⁷

Harney also raises the subject of Tiwi memory in his comment that

The song relating to this event (the occupation of Fort Dundas) was sung at a Pukamani over one hundred and thirty years later, and the song man's words,

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

“Putunanatari pantapi damonnia” (“Buffalo carrying logs and stumbling down”) refer to the buffalo as a beast of burden carrying the logs during the building of the Fort.⁸⁸

As the buffalo were not brought onto the island until after the establishment of the fort, this song must refer to later construction around the settlement. Thus in various ways the Islanders absorbed the Fort Dundas experience into their culture, but its effect upon their lifestyle was minimal. They demonstrated that, despite their lack of social organisation and their limited traditional warfare methods of small group and guerrilla attacks, they were prepared to defend their land. Yet, like other indigenous groups actively involved in Australia’s frontier conflict, their role in colonial history was denied to them for many years.

In 1829, the Islanders were not to know that their successes would be limited. Contact with the outside world was to increase over the ensuing years until it became a permanent aspect of their lives. In the years following the abandoning of Fort Dundas, the Tiwi were to encounter not only Macassans and Aborigines from the mainland of the Northern Territory, but also the survivors of several shipwrecks and parties of Australians exploring the islands. Their isolation, which had lasted for thousands of years, was gradually coming to an end.

¹ H.R.A., Series 111, 5, 1922, p. 766, Bremer to Croker, August 1824.

² Letter, *J.S. Roe to James Roe, H.M. Ship Tamar - at Sea - Lat 16_S Long 113_E, 29 November 1824*, pp. 2-3; Ennis, *op. cit.*, p. 12. A number of sources give incorrect dates for the establishment of the fort.

³ Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4; Ennis *op. cit.*, pp. 4 and 12; John Septimus Roe to John Piper, H.M. Ship Tamar, at Sea, 7 December 1824, *Piper Correspondence*, No. 815; Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 131; Meston, A., “Australia’s Largest Island”. In *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1/5/1914.

⁴ Ennis, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

⁵ Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁶ Ennis, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

⁷ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 785-786, Bremer to Lord Bathurst, 12/11/1824. Bremer gave the names Intercourse River and Intercourse Point to the site of this meeting.

⁸ Hill (1951), p. 44.

⁹ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 773-774, Bremer to Croker, 11/11/1824.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ H.R.A.(1922), *op. cit.*

¹² Reynolds (1978), *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹³ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 774-775, Bremer to Croker, 11/11/1824.

¹⁴ Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ *Ibid*; H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 775; Ennis, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁶ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 775-777.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 772.

¹⁸ Robinson, F. and York, B., *The Black Resistance*, Camberwell: Widescope International Publishers, 1977, p. 94.

- ¹⁹ Lockwood, D., *The Front Door*, Adelaide: Rigby, 1968, p. 9.
- ²⁰ Piper Correspondence, *op. cit.*; Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.
- ²¹ Lewis, John, "The President's Annual Address". In *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia: South Australia Branch, Session 1914-15*, 1916., p. 13. Bauer, Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 30, Howard, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83, Beckett, *op. cit.*, Meston, *op. cit.*, and Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 132, present slight variations for the population on this date. Crosby, E., *Survey and Excavation at Fort Dundas, Melville Island, Northern Territory, 1975*, Australian Society for Historical Archaeology Occasional Paper No. 1, 1978, University of Sydney, 1978, p.3. states that at no time was the population of the settlement much over 100 people.
- ²² Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 49.
- ²³ *Ibid*, p. 45. Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, various pages, gives details of feuds.
- ²⁴ Crosby, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
- ²⁵ *The Northern Territory News*, "First Efforts to Settle N.T. (sic) were Failures", 24/4/1952, p. 6, quoting Frederick Watson, editor of the Historical Records of Australia; H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 801, Campbell to Macleay, 8/4/1827.
- ²⁶ H.R.A. Series III, 6, 1923, p. 666, Campbell to Macleay, 10/10/1826.
- ²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 656, Barlow to Macleay, 28/2/1826.
- ²⁸ Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- ²⁹ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
- ³⁰ Barrett, Charles, *White Blackfellows*. Melbourne: Hallcraft Publishing Co., 1948, pp. 108-109; James, *op. cit.*, p. 18; H.W.L.S., "Australia's first defence post", *The Age*, 14/3/1942. H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. xiii; Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 133; McIntosh, A.M., "Early Settlement in North Australia", *Medical Journal of Australia*, Vol. 1. No. 13, 1958, p. 410, states that the *Lady Nelson* was attacked, run ashore and burnt at Aluta Island. None of the crew survived the attack by the pirates. Barrett, above, states that the remains of the *Lady Nelson* was discovered at Baba, "a haunt of treacherous and cruel Malays, who made a business of piracy". The *Daily Mirror*, *op. cit.*, alleged that the crew of the *Lady Nelson* had been murdered by the Tiwi.
- ³¹ James, *op. cit.*, p. 18; McIntosh, *op. cit.*, p. 410; Bach, *op. cit.*, pp. 227, 235 (note 35); Barrett, *op. cit.*, pp. 100-106; H.W.L.S. (sic), *op. cit.*, p. 8; Howard, *op. cit.*, pp. 84-85; Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 29; H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. xiii; H.R.A., Series 1, 13, 1920, p. 110, Darling to Bathurst, 12/2/1827; Earl, (1856), *op. cit.*, p. 5; Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
- ³² H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 673, Campbell to Macleay, 1/10/1826; H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 823, Campbell to Macleay, 9/11/1827; H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 681, Campbell to Macleay, 20/12/1826.
- ³³ *Ibid*, pp. 671, 676, Campbell to Macleay 10/10/1826, Enclosure M, No. 1.
- ³⁴ Grassby, A. and Hill, M., *Six Australian Battlefields*, North Ryde, Angus and Robertson, 1988, p. 61.
- ³⁵ Robinson and York, *loc. cit.*
- ³⁶ See Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 153-154.
- ³⁷ Robinson and York, *loc. cit.*; H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 700, Campbell to Macleay, 29/9/1827.
- ³⁸ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 808, Campbell to Macleay, 8/4/1827; Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 157.
- ³⁹ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 155.
- ⁴⁰ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 700, Campbell to Macleay, 29/9/1827.
- ⁴¹ Campbell, *loc. cit.* There is no recorded indication of the prisoner's fate.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ⁴² Lefort, Bernard, *Ngirramini Ngini Pirikipuwarri Awuta British Amintiya Tiwi*, Nguuu: Nguuu Ngingingawila Literature Production Centre, 1985, p. 12; Summerhayes, K., "The First Territorians". In *Walkabout*, Vol. 35. No. 5, May 1961, p. 16; Pilling, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-304.
- ⁴³ Lefort, *loc. cit.*
- ⁴⁴ Morris, John, "An Outline of the History of the Settlement at Fort Wellington, Raffles Bay, Northern Territory". In *Fort Wellington, Raffles Bay, Northern Australia*, Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 1971, p. 23. The site of Fort Wellington was taken possession of on 18 June, 1827.
- ⁴⁵ James, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- ⁴⁶ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 709, statement by Samuel Dowsett, early 1828 (actual date not indicated).
- ⁴⁷ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, pp. 701-705, 9/11/1827, Enclosures, Minutes of Inquiry into the Murder of John Gold and John Green, 3/11/1827; *Ibid*, p. 709-710, Statement by Samuel Dowsett, early 1828, describes the victims' wounds.
- ⁴⁸ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, p. 822, Campbell to Macleay, 9/11/1827.
- ⁴⁹ H.R.A. (1920), *op. cit.*, p. 794, Darling to Huskisson, 25/2/1820.
- ⁵⁰ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 713, Campbell to Macleay, 1/4/1828.
- ⁵¹ Stone, S.N. (Ed.), *Aborigines in White Australia*, South Yarra: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974, p. 19.
- ⁵² Wilson, T.B., *Narrative of a Voyage Round the World*, (1835), London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968, p. 125.
- ⁵³ Bethel, Walter E., "Early Move to Colonise Nth. Australia". In *The Sun*, Sydney, 13/4/1935.
- ⁵⁴ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 721, Campbell to Macleay, 20/6/1828.
- ⁵⁵ Wilson, *loc. cit.*
- ⁵⁶ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 763, Hartley to Macleay, 8/9/1828.
- ⁵⁷ Earl, (1856), *op. cit.*, p. 5, wrote "... the density of the forests enabled the natives to make their attacks with comparative impunity".
- ⁵⁸ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 760, Hartley to Macleay, 8/9/1828.
- ⁵⁹ Wilson, *loc. cit.*
- ⁶⁰ Spillett, Peter, *Forsaken Settlement*, Melbourne: Lansdowne, 1972, pp. 30, 55, 73-74 and 146-149.
- ⁶¹ H.R.A., Series 1, 14, 1922, pp. 214-215, Murray to Darling, 31/5/1828. Jarratt, P., "Australia's forgotten islands/Northern Territory. Tiwi Islands", *The Bulletin*, 28 January - 4 February, 1992, p. 135, incorrectly states that after Fort Dundas the northern presence was "moved to the malarial back waters of Port Essington where it was equally disastrous."
- ⁶² *Ibid*, p. 521.
- ⁶³ H.R.A. (1923), *op. cit.*, p. 765, Hartley to Macleay, 17/6/1829.
- ⁶⁴ Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 33; *The Daily Mirror*, *op. cit.*; Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-46, 48-49, embellishes the history of Fort Dundas.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid*
- ⁶⁶ Hill (5/4/1935), *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- ⁶⁷ Roberts, Jan. *Massacres to Mining*. Blackburn: Dove Communications, 1981, p. 23; C. Cook, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- ⁶⁸ Parsons, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

- ⁶⁹ *The Age*, "Melville Island. Its White Chief", 12/1/1911, p. 7.
- ⁷⁰ Horton, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 1076.
- ⁷¹ Jarratt, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
- ⁷² Meston, *op.cit.*
- ⁷³ Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 153.
- ⁷⁴ Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 302.
- ⁷⁵ Mulvaney, D.J. *Encounters in Place*. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994, p. 69. Lewis, *op. cit.*, p. 34, quotes Campbell as saying that Port Essington was the friendly hand of Australia, welcoming trade from the peoples of South East Asia.
- ⁷⁶ Earl, (1853), *op. cit.*, p. 8; Wilson, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-125. Mulvaney, (1994), *loc. cit.* Grassby and Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
- ⁷⁷ Pilling, A.R., "An Australian Aboriginal Minority: The Tiwi See Themselves as a Dominant Majority". In *Phylon*, Vol. 26, No. 4, Winter, 1965, p. 312.
- ⁷⁸ H.R.A. (1922), *op. cit.*, pp. 214-215, Murray to Darling, 31/5/1828.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 521.
- ⁸⁰ Gee, L.C.E., "Journal and Detail Description of Country Traversed." *Itinerary and Miscellaneous Papers in Northern Territory of South Australia, North-Western District, Reports (Geological and General) Resulting from the Explorations made by the Government Geologist and Staff During 1905*, H.Y.L. Brown (Government Geologist), Adelaide: Government Printer, 1906, p. 52.
- ⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 45.
- ⁸² Howard, *op. cit.*, pp. 84 - 85.
- ⁸³ Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 16; Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Hill, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- ⁸⁴ Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
- ⁸⁵ Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Robinson and York, *loc. cit.*
- ⁸⁶ Poignant, Roslyn, "Ryko's photographs of the 'Fort Dundas Riot': the story so far." In *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, 1996/no. 2, 1996, pp. 24 - 41. The "Fort Dundas Riot" dance portrayed the shooting of several Tiwi by British troops.
- ⁸⁷ Mountford, C.P. "Expedition to the Land of the Tiwi". In *The National Geographic Magazine*. Vol. 109. No. 3, March 1956, p. 419.
- ⁸⁸ Harney, (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 91.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Widening World - Indonesians to Australians

(1700 - 1894)

By 1830, the virtual isolation of the Tiwi community was breaking down. Communication with the Islanders during the remainder of the nineteenth century was initiated by Australian and Asian interests, apart from a few brief visits by several British vessels. The reaction of the Tiwi to visitors in the past had been a mixed one, but was mostly hostile. The greater number of visitors to the islands after 1830 led to a series of violent clashes which were to earn the Tiwi a reputation as untrustworthy, ferocious and even, erroneously, of cannibalism. Such claims were quite a common part of the attitude of many European-Australians towards Aborigines and Islanders as a whole. The real issue on the expanding frontier for both indigenous and settler communities was about winning and defending land. Europeans argued that the Aborigines and Islanders did not legally own their land and, further, that their economy did not require them to own land. The Tiwi situation was a cameo of the larger picture, government and private citizens alike not recognising them as the owners of their islands. As a result, these outsiders failed to understand the reason for the increasing number of conflicts following the abandonment of Fort Dundas.

Distinct from mainland groups, the reputation of the Tiwi refused to diminish, like that of the eastern Arnhem Land people. Both groups bore a reputation that was part apocryphal, part truth. The mystique of the Tiwi developed further as the colony of South Australia, now responsible for the Northern Territory, attempted to open it up for settlement. This not only brought a small number of shipwrecks around the islands, but also resulted in a spate of Australian explorers and other interested parties to the islands. The reaction of the Tiwi to such newcomers was usually less than peaceful. There were, too, attacks upon Indonesian seafarers, and clashes with neighbouring mainland tribes. Despite these intermittent contacts the culture of the Islanders remained unchanged except for a few additions to their material possessions. As for relations with the Indonesians, whether aggressive or peaceful, these were probably older than those with the Europeans.

Some debate has occurred as to the level of contact between the Tiwi and the Indonesian trepang fishermen known variously as Malays, Macassans and Makassans.¹ The Tiwi know them as *Malai-ui* (Malays) or Macassarmen. The trepangers have a long history of trade and contact with the people of Arnhem Land beginning about 1700 A.D.² The sea route between the Indonesian Archipelago and Arnhem Land frequently took the Macassans along the full length of the northern coast

of Melville Island or Aimba Mootiara (Amba), as the trepangers called it, the voyages taking place between 1775 and 1906.³ It is reasonable to expect that some form of communication would have taken place between the Macassans and the Tiwi over this period of several hundred years or more. The question is what form did it take? Secondary records such as a range of historical records, oral histories and published material, discuss the issue but it is here, and in the history of meetings between the Tiwi and people of other cultures after the abandoning of Fort Dundas, that Islander oral history and memory demonstrate their value and their importance in the researching of the ethnohistory of the islands community.

The Islanders' version of their meetings with the seafarers from the Indonesian Archipelago and, indeed, of many of the meetings as such, with the *Malai-ui* depends upon the memories and oral stories of elderly Tiwi men. When these were recorded by the writer in the 1960s an interpreter was needed upon occasions, resulting in the stories being told in fairly good English. Several were recorded in Tiwi pidgin-English, while shorter stories and memories of incidents were taken down in note form. In theory, considering the Arnhem Land experience with the Macassans which led to a noticeable level of cultural variation, contact between the Tiwi and the *Malai-ui* should have resulted in very apparent changes to the Islanders' culture, including religion, language and counting techniques, in addition to a range of material items and art techniques.⁴ The more regular the contact the greater the acculturation should be. Resistance to cultural change aside, the level of acculturation found should indicate whether the contacts were intermittent or regular as in Arnhem Land.

The Indonesians were allegedly advised by the Dutch not to visit the Tiwi Islands, which were said to be infested with pirates.⁵ The only located reference to advice of this nature is a statement given to Captain Henry Smyth at Fort Wellington in February, 1828. Smyth reported that trepanger Daeng Riolo had told him that "...his instructions are to avoid going to Melville Island (Aimba Mootiar) as that part of the coast is infested with pirates from Amboyna, etc."⁶ Commenting on this statement, Major Campbell, former commandant at Fort Dundas, wrote, "I have not heard of or seen any of these Pirates, unless the Dutch kindly designate us as such."⁷ Although it is difficult to substantiate this instruction, it has been reiterated frequently by later researchers and writers. Whatever the reason, the Macassans did fear the Tiwi.⁸ King learnt of "perpetual warfare" from the *Malai-ui*, which Macknight felt, related to the Tiwi Islands. The Islanders, it is stated, were consistently hostile towards strangers who landed on their shores.⁹ One trepanger, Daeng Sarro contrasted the hostility of the Tiwi with the friendliness of the Aborigines on the Cobourg Peninsula.¹⁰ Searcy, too, wrote of the apparent failure of "the Malays" to make friends with the Tiwi.¹¹

Writing of the Macassans, Davidson felt that

Their relations with the natives of these (Tiwi) islands apparently were never friendly, which fact may partly account for the lack of prominent influences in this area (the Tiwi Islands).¹²

This is substantiated by Captain Collet Barker who reported from Fort Wellington in 1829, that a Macassan trepanger named "...Pamanano knew Melville Island. The blacks there were very bad and threatened with their spears whenever you approached them."¹³

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Some authors argue that the Macassans never visited the Tiwi Islands to harvest trepang.¹⁴ Mountford implies this, when he says that the dugout canoe, an important symbol of Indonesian-Australian trade, was introduced to the Tiwi by mainland Aborigines and not directly by Macassans.¹⁵ In 1930, Hart wrote of the Tiwi's "years of conflict with the Malays", but it is difficult to clarify whether he was referring to inter-cultural clashes following accidental Macassan shipwrecks on the islands or to clashes which occurred when trepangers attempted to trade with the Tiwi. Hart and Pilling claimed that any Macassan landing on the islands did so through misfortune only, arguing that no trepangers

...wanted to stop at Melville Island, and they considered their misfortune to be great if their proas happened to be wrecked on its coast. They, like other Indonesians blown to the homeland of the Tiwi, had little chance of surviving, for the Tiwi normally speared such poorly armed intruders and asked questions later.¹⁶

On the other hand, Simpson makes the unqualified statement that "several hundred years before the white man came Malays appeared in praus, with steel and cloth and wanting pearlshell and bêche-de-mer (trepang)."¹⁷ Though not fully correct in his details, Gsell, who lived on Bathurst Island for many years, agrees with Simpson. Writing of Malayan travellers Gsell claimed that,

These Malayan sailors in their frail canoes paused for rest and refreshment at the (Tiwi) islands on their route, trading with the aborigines by exchanging what they had to offer chiefly for tortoise shell. In the main, relations were friendly; and since the aborigines had no objection to trading their women, the purity of the island race was inevitably affected.¹⁸

The knowledge of at least some of the Tiwi about Macassan activities along the coast of the mainland, as well as around the Tiwi Islands, is illustrated in the first of two events recounted by Paddy Porkilari:

Macassarmen, he bin come from his own country. He bin come past here. He bin come through. Alright, he lookem for trepang. He come right through here. He gottem lippa lippa, big canoe longa him. He get nothing here. He bin go across with prau. Alright, he go across now. He go along mainland. Alright, he findem there...east. Cookem there trepang. Now he got a lotta "tomarang" (Malay iron pots). Alright, he stop there. You know Maningrida? Right up there. Cookem there trepang. Alright, Malay Bay. He gottem one coconut. He bin finish now, I think. Caledon Bay, they bin killem there. He bin finish now that country. Alright, not this place; he bin come right through, could'nt findem trepang. He bin go past now. Go back now.¹⁹

Macassans, recounted Paddy, came to the Tiwi Islands equipped with canoes. They failed to locate trepang in Apsley Strait. They sailed to Arnhem Land where they found and cooked the sea slugs near the site of Maningrida Aboriginal township, and in Malay Bay where there used to be a single coconut tree. At Caledon Bay the Macassans clashed with the Yolngu (Aborigines) and returned to the Tiwi Islands. Once again they were unsuccessful in fishing for trepang, so they sailed back to Macassar.

There is no question that contact did occur with Macassans, some of whom physically left their mark in the Tiwi community. Roe, for instance, saw a boy with Malay features on the shoulders of "one of the Indians" during King's visit to the islands in 1818.²⁰ Like

Bremer, Roe saw a young man of similar appearance in 1824, possibly the same person captured by Campbell later on, but these would not appear to be common.²¹ Hill speaks of the physical features, activities and arts of the Tiwi which show “strong evidence of Malay derivation”.²² Pye notes that “some of the Tiwi have inherited the features and names of the Macassans...”, while in recent times, only three Tiwi were identified as being of Malay descent.²³ One of these is mentioned in the second historical narrative recounted by Paddy Porkilari:

The Macassarmen landed at Panarli and bin go through East. People bin sell long yam to Macassarmen. Alright, he sellem long him. Alright he givem towel, chopper (kriss). Alright, coconut sellem. Our people bin eat them. Stop here one year. Before that, wild people. Karlo (no) white man. No more bin fight alonga Panarli, nothing. Alright, him say, “Me fell go home”. Poon-go (big boss), he boss, say this. He boss along boats belong him. This Malayman breed all finish now; finish alonga war. You know that Indonesian woman come along this place? Marrupwantatila belong her people.

Apparently Macassan trepangers spent some time in the vicinity of Panarli (Cape Gambier). The period of one year, as given by Paddy, can be safely disregarded as the Macassans were in North Australian waters for only six months of each year. During their stay the trepang fishermen engaged in barter with the Mandiimbula whose country took in Panarli, trading coconuts, krisses and material for yams. According to Paddy, the Islanders had been ferocious before the arrival of these particular Macassans, but no trouble occurred during this visit. The direct offspring of liaisons between the Tiwi and the Macassans, stated Paddy, had all passed away by World War Two. However, he pointed out that one Tiwi woman who was still alive in 1965 was also of Macassan descent. He did this by comparing her with an Indonesian woman who was shipwrecked on Bathurst Island in 1960.

It has been suggested that the small quantity of trepang around the Islands and navigation difficulties at the northern entrance to Apsley Strait contributed to a lack of Macassan presence in the islands.²⁴ Allen, like the writer, collected several sherds of Macassan pottery from the area of the Fort Dundas site, but this discovery does not necessarily suggest direct contact with Macassans. Nevertheless, evidence exists that occasional contact did occur between Macassans and the Tiwi. Macassan knowledge of the Melville Island coastline is indicated by the Indonesian names given to at least four bays by the trepangers.²⁵ Customs Officer and buffalo shooter E.O. Robinson, who was aware of Macassan activity at Shark Bay, on Melville Island, located evidence of trepanging there.²⁶ Spillett has identified four camp sites on Melville Island.²⁷ Tiwi informants cite several additional localities, including the southern end of Apsley Strait.²⁸ One elder said that the *Malai-ui* worked trepang at Laetari, Melville Island.²⁹ Further, Alan Pupajua stated that

My grandfather, old Pupajua, told me that Macassarmen worked trepang through Eastern Melville Island, Snake Bay, Ulurangku (Karlsruhe) Island, Ira-pulu (Shark Bay), Wilintu Island in Shark Bay and Im-mari-junga (White Ochre), east of Cape Van Diemen. They used big canoes to fish for trepang and cooked it on the shores. They paddled, using a big paddle to steer at the rear of each canoe. They did not search for trepang off Bathurst Island. Now this happened when my father was still a baby. My grandfather only looked at the Macassarmen. No one worked for them.”³⁰

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

In Macassar, Spillett learnt of Macassan contacts with the Tiwi, the stories told to him there contrasting with “theories of only limited contact” and of limited conflict with the Islanders.³¹ Despite Tiwi hostility, a number of praus, says Spillett, did fish for trepang at Melville Island, making use of at least one well in Shark Bay.³² While there is no clear evidence to indicate how often the praus anchored around the islands, particularly Melville Island, Tiwi oral history speaks of instances of trade with the Macassans or of Macassans themselves working trepang. There is little reference to violence during such visits by trepangers, although there is mention of spearing one *Malai-ui* on Melville Island, and the stealing of a dugout canoe from trepangers on another occasion.³³

In the instance in which the canoe was taken, a prau sailed into a bay at Takambi, in Turupi (Jurrupi). As a very old informant, Illatumi, was told by his father, Piantiringilla, the Macassans greeted the Tiwi with cries of “Pongki! Pongki!”, the island salutation of peace. One of the first to welcome the Macassans was Piantiringilla, also known as Tipilatjimirri. Showing off his daughter to the newcomers, he said to them, “Me Tipilatjimirri; my daughter Tipulatjimotipa.” The Turupula agreed to assist the *Malai-ui* in their search for trepang off Takambi. In return they received sugarcane, coconuts, rice and tobacco leaf. The rice, which was carried in lengths of hollow bamboo, was tasted by these Turupula for the first time. They were astonished at the loud cracking noise it made when cooked on the fire. It is quite possible that this was the first visit to Turupi by the Macassans, at least during the life time of the Piantiringilla’s generation. Conversely, if this was so, why didn’t the Turupula attack them, as the Tiwi had done when a number of other strangers landed on the islands? The Turupula could have been aware of goods offered to other Tiwi during earlier *Malai-ui* visits and may have decided to actively participate in the available trade.

Each prau carried a number of dugout canoes (*lippa lippa*) from which trepanging operations were carried out. Despite the demonstration of friendship, Piantiringilla stole one of these canoes from the Indonesians, hiding it in a creek. The next morning the Macassans unsuccessfully searched for the canoe, eventually sailing from Takambi without it. In circumstances which cannot be clarified the *Malai-ui* took a Turupula girl back to Macassar with them. There she gave birth to a son by a Macassan man. She remained there until her death. Later the son, Mindaroli, sailed to the Cobourg Peninsula with trepangers. Taking an Iwaidja woman, Yair-a-kart, he settled in her country at Cape Don, their descendants still living in Iwaidja country today.³⁴

Despite some non-Aboriginal contradiction, there is a local opinion that tamarind trees on the Tiwi Islands are of Macassan origin.³⁵ And, according to oral history, Macassans introduced the Tiwi to tobacco and rice, as well as other items of trade.³⁶ This picture of peaceful dealings between the Islanders and trepangers is, contradicted by various official reports on praus shipwrecked on Melville Island. At least two praus came to grief on the island in 1882 and a further two in 1887.³⁷ In each case, the crew was attacked by the Tiwi, resulting in several crew members being killed or wounded.³⁸ Customs Officer Alfred Searcy felt justified, then, in reporting that

One or two (praus/proas) intended going to Melville Island but I do not think that such is the case because the natives there are very antagonistic to the Malays as one found to his cost two or three years ago when his proa was wrecked there.³⁹

At least one shipwrecked crew escaped an attack in approximately the middle of the nineteenth century. According to Jerry Kerinauia, a group of Tiwi, including his father,

were camped at Aliyu, on Melville Island, in preparation for a ceremony. It was the Wet Season. A large Macassan craft called a “mist-ar” appeared off the coast in heavy seas. It was not trepaning around the island but was bound for Port Essington, where there were

*plenty men (Macassans). On board were 'plenty canoe; gottem canoe, how many? Eight. Big ones. Boat come close-up that reef. Break that boat, Can't help it. Boat hit reef, turn over , broke ribs. Sea went over it. Sea pushed it up again. Big hole, two. More better go ashore. Men put canoes in water, jumped in. Then let tide carry "mist-ar" ashore. Sea pushed it ashore, high tide. Tide just left it there.*⁴⁰

As Jerry Kerinauia stated, the prau, which carried eight canoes, was wrecked at Aliyu while sailing to Port Essington on the mainland. The crew managed to reach the beach where the Tiwi allowed the *Malai-ui* to rest. When the damaged vessel was washed ashore and stranded the seafarers salvaged food from it. They gave some cooked rice in bamboo containers to the Tiwi, calling this rice “whitee”. There was no antagonism between the two groups of people, who communicated in sign language. The stranded Macassans worked from their canoes to harvest a variety of sea foods and then set out to paddle to the mainland where they knew other praus were operating. The Tiwi were given to understand that the wrecked vessel now belonged to them. The Islanders stripped it of its contents - tomahawks, calico, knives called “tun-kal-oo” by the *Malai-ui*, and rice, “not proper rice, big one.”

Tiwi oral history also recounts incidents of castaways who were washed onto the shores of the islands before the Islanders' era of isolation came to an end. Nearly all of the castaways seemed to come from south-east or southern Asia. The one story which refers to the new arrivals as being of European origin, and the only one to involve violence, is told in mythical form, but the possibility exists of the myth having some factual basis. The castaway who is most prominent in Tiwi culture and history is Murugualaki or Murukuliki. If oral evidence is correct, this man lived in Tikilaru, in the south-west of Bathurst Island, after coming ashore. He would have died there around the turn of the century or a little earlier. Domestic practices performed by Murugualaki indicate that he came from South-east Asia, possibly the Indonesian Archipelago.⁴¹ The other incidents recounted by the Islanders are likewise told as being of historical fact. These include the stories of three Asian couples, who were separately cast ashore from canoes in the nineteenth century.⁴² The likelihood of such incidents occurring, and of the couples being Indonesian, is supported by similar landings on the Tiwi Islands and the Northern Territory mainland in more recent years.⁴³ According to the Tiwi each of the couples spent some time on the islands before departing for their homelands.

It is difficult to clarify the full extent of the impact of Indonesian culture upon the Tiwi. Davidson claims that their influence was minimal, a view echoed by Macknight.⁴⁴ The use of the dugout canoes by the Tiwi could be proof of Macassan-Tiwi contact.⁴⁵ While saying that the Macassans were probably familiar with the Tiwi Islands, Macknight states that Van Delft's expedition of 1705 saw no trepangers and only bark canoes on the northern coast of Melville Island.⁴⁶ Davidson, like Mountford, argues that utilisation of dugout canoes in the Tiwi Islands might have resulted from mainland Aboriginal influence, as bark canoes were still the principal model on Bathurst Island in 1911.⁴⁷ Macknight suggests that initially the Tiwi could have obtained dugout canoes by theft or from wrecked praus and that the Aborigines in the Northern Territory may not have

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

constructed dugouts regularly until the very end of the Macassan trade period in 1907.⁴⁸ A Macassan canoe also featured in a Tiwi feud on Melville Island in about the 1860s.⁴⁹ How the Tiwi came by this canoe is not now known, although Tiwi elders are of the opinion that such craft resulted directly from contact with the *Malai-ui* and not indirectly through mainland Aborigines.⁵⁰ Whether the Tiwi adopted the wooden canoe as a direct result of Macassan influence or not is difficult to resolve, but it is clear from the oral history that they were desirable goods and considered valuable by the Tiwi.

Other cultural exchanges also occurred, but the extent of such influences is difficult to measure.⁵¹ There is no record, for instance, of the Tiwi possessing Macassan smoking pipes, although the Tiwi received tobacco leaf from the *Malai-ui* at Panarli (Cape Gambier). Instead, the Tiwi used crab's claw pipes. Nor is there any indication of Indonesian themes being incorporated into Tiwi religious practices as occurred in Arnhem Land. Krastins suggests that Tiwi artists gained new subjects from the Macassans, basing this on reproductions of several bark paintings.⁵² However, the subject of these paintings are plainly European luggers, not Macassan vessels.

Searcy is explicit in suggesting that

*Judging from the appearance of some of the sheets of bark (on Tiwi huts), it seemed as if the niggers had steel tools, very likely procured from the Malay wrecked proas.*⁵³

This is supported by Paddy Porkilari's narrative about peaceful contact at Cape Gambier on Melville Island. Likewise, in 1911, Basedow observed the use of sharp implements on Bathurst Island.⁵⁴ Another possible result of *Malai-ui* contact with the Islanders is the Tiwi custom of raising a flag over or in front of a house when an occupant dies. Little has been written about this custom within the Islands mortuary ritual, a custom which, Worms points out, is "without parallel in the rest of Australia" and appears to have arrived from Indonesia "at recent date".⁵⁵

The introduction of the dugout canoe aside, however, the incorporation of Macassan words into the Tiwi language is probably the biggest Indonesian influence on the Islanders' culture.⁵⁶ Macknight indicates the need for caution when considering the trepangers' influence on the Tiwi, due in part to difficulty in recognising aspects of Macassan culture brought to the islands by Iwaidja people from the Cobourg Peninsula around the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁷ Osborne considers that Macassan loan-words used by the Tiwi came by way of the Iwaidja.⁵⁸ Of at least 25 such words, there are those still thought of as Macassan in origin, while others are seen as indirect loans introduced by way of the Iwaidja.⁵⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century the Tiwi and mainland Aborigines each spoke some "Malay" words in common proof of some level of acculturation even if the means of acquisition cannot be distinguished.⁶⁰

The dearth of appropriate historical records makes it difficult to ascertain the true level of contact between the trepangers and the Tiwi, or the actual degree of resulting influence upon the Islanders' culture. There was an increasing number of such visitors to the islands during the nineteenth century, but until 1895 they appeared to have had little effect upon the Tiwi. In Arnhem Land the long and regular history of trade between the Indonesians and the coastal groups brought changes and additions to the local art, religion, language, counting systems, material culture and food menu. In contrast, the Tiwi adopted only the dugout canoe, a few Macassan or Malay words, and the use of the taboo flag, in addition to gaining some axes, sharp tools and, occasionally, food and

**VESSELS KNOWN TO BE WRECKED OR GROUNDED
AROUND THE TIWI ISLANDS UP TO 1918**

VESSEL	YEAR/DATE	WHERE WRECKED/GROUNDED
Indonesian Prau	1860s?	* Aliyu, north-west of Lethbridge Bay, Melville Island
Wanganui	1860s/1870s?	* Minanyarpi Creek, Cape Fourcroy, Bathurst Island
Afghan	1880s	# Southern Coast of Bathurst Island
Jago's prau	Early 1882	* North Coast of Melville Island
Jane Anderson +	29 June 1886	# Mermaid Reef, north of Bathurst Island
Jane Anderson +	2 July 1886	* Cape Fourcroy, Bathurst Island
Northern	2 October 1886	# Cape Fourcroy, Bathurst Island
Erang Polea (prau)	16 December 1887	* North Coast of Melville Island
Lasalsaya (prau)	21 December 1887	* North Coast of Melville Island
Airlie	27 June 1899	# North-West Vernon Island
Javanese prau	1 April 1917	* West Coast of Bathurst Island

* Wrecked

Grounded

+ The Jane Anderson was wrecked off Cape Fourcroy after being floated off Mermaid Reef.

Fig. 8 *Source: Hart, Pilling and Goodale, 1998, p. 106; Interviews with Jerry Kerinaiua, 18/2/1965, Father William Henschke, 2/9/1964 and Paw Paw Puruntatameri, 6/8/1964; AA Series B543, Item W216/1/2104, 17/4/1917-24/4/1917; Reports of the Government Resident of the Northern Territory 1886 and 1899; South Australian Archives, E.O. Robinson to Sub-Collector of Customs, Darwin, 9/1/1887; Office of Minister for Northern Territory, No. 346, 13/4/1882, Reports from E.O. Robinson to Government Resident, 12/2/1882 and 30/3/1882.*

other goods. The small range of articles indicates irregular contact between the two cultures whether directly or indirectly. Nevertheless, as Pye wrote, "The Macassans were certainly the final stepping stone for the Tiwi as they went forward to meet the intruders from the mainland...", that is, permanent contact with the outside world.⁶¹

Before this occurred, however, attempts to settle the Northern Territory mainland resulted in a progressive build-up of shipping passing by the islands. Some stopped to visit, others were as a result of shipwrecks. In mid-1839, a party from the survey vessel

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Beagle landed on the south-eastern coast of Melville Island, but no Tiwi were seen.⁶² A number of European and Australasian vessels came to grief off the islands between 1844 and 1899.⁶³ As far as can be ascertained, the earliest incident of physical contact between non-Asiatic shipwrecked people and Tiwi followed the beaching of the steamer *Wanganui* on south-western Bathurst Island. The fact that it is not mentioned in histories of Palmerston Stockade or Darwin indicates that the wreck possibly occurred before these settlements were established. Tiwi oral history tells how a spear was thrown at the castaways and how Islanders retrieved iron from the wreck to be made into knives. Flour was salvaged but thrown away as its use was unknown. The loss of the steamer is commemorated in European history by the naming of Wanganui Rock, near Cape Helvetius.

The Islanders built up their reputation for hostility to change when, in 1886, H.M.S. *Flying Fish* undertook a survey of the waters off eastern Melville Island. Reporting on the survey, Parsons wrote,

*The natives of Melville Island, too, appeared to have a determined hostility to any erections on their shores, or else they had an indefinite use for timber and cloth. They invariably endeavoured, and usually succeeded in taking down and carrying away beacons wherever they had a chance.*⁶⁴

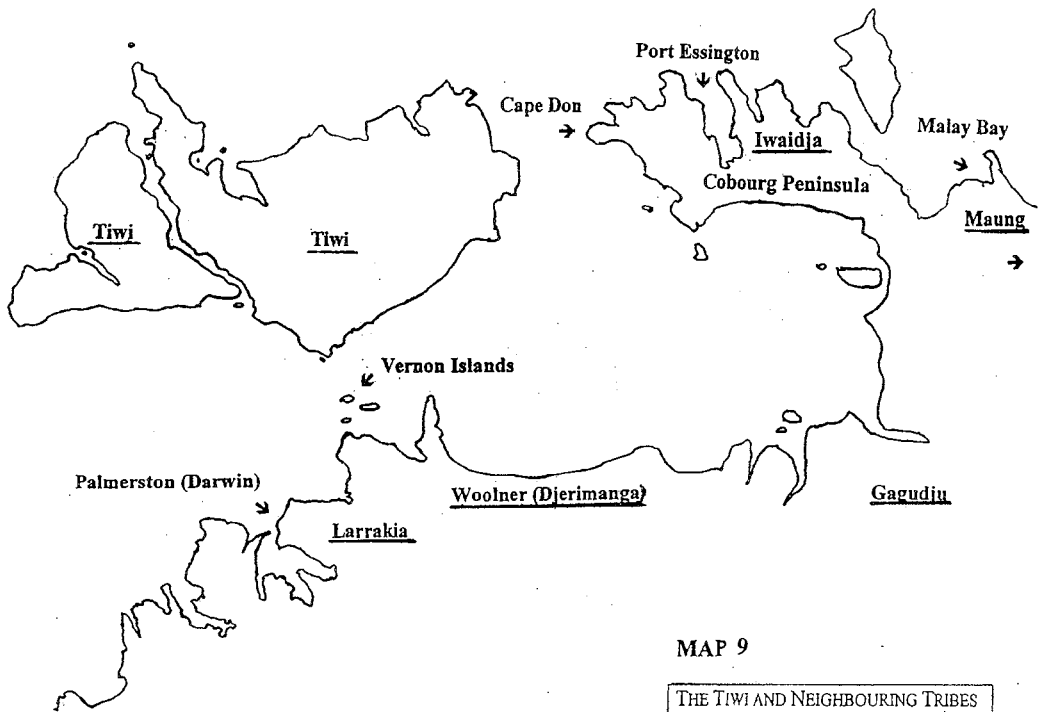
The Islanders could well have been playing the role of “destructives”, destroying European property located on their territory. The survey continued in 1887, but there are no further reports of encounters with the Tiwi. In the late nineteenth century the Tiwi continued to defend their islands from outside peoples and, to a large extent, from all outside influences. Their attitude to visitors varied but did not encourage settlement by European or Asian people. As a result, they remained the only occupants of the islands and their lifestyle remained virtually unchanged.

All available evidence indicates that whenever contact did occur between groups of Tiwi and visitors to their shores the reactions of the Islanders was usually one of belligerence in one form or another. But did the Tiwi at any time actively seek communication with outside people? The question of Tiwi visits to the mainland prior to permanent contact with the outside world was a subject of much debate in the past. Several anthropologists theorised incorrectly that the Tiwi were completely isolated from Aborigines on the nearby mainland until at least 1895.⁶⁵ But some residents of the infant township of Palmerston (Darwin) referred to raids upon mainland Aborigines by the Tiwi. Gsell spoke to at least one Larrakia man who was familiar with the Tiwi raids.⁶⁶ Tiwi oral history and genealogies confirm that raids upon the mainland did occur and that, on at least several occasions, the Larrakia raided Melville Island, capturing a few Tiwi women. Evidence indicates that it was mainly men from Eastern Melville Island who ventured to the region of coastline extending from the Adelaide River south to the site of Darwin, the tribal territories of the Larrakia and Woolner (Woolna) people. In the words of Matthias Ulungura, “Everybody fight there (the mainland). Old day people used to go all around and fight, canoe, not same canoe, bark one, and fight Larrakia. Larrakia used to come across and fight, too.” Jerry Kerinauia added, “Tiwi and Larrakia met at Eeparli in Impinari where Purukupali and Tapara fought.”⁶⁷ In the days before the coming of the buffalo shooters and the missionaries, the two men recount, the Tiwi travelled by bark canoes, not dugouts, to the mainland to fight. Likewise, the Larrakia came across to eastern Melville Island to fight the Tiwi at the place where, in the

The Widening World - Indonesians to Australians

Creation Period, the ancestral beings Purukupali and Tapara fought to the death over Purukupali's wife.

Unfortunately, Tiwi oral history concerning such raids is now available only from about the middle of the nineteenth century. The last Tiwi raid upon the mainland must have taken place after 1870, according to Pilling's research, while the Islanders' oral history points to Larrakia parties raiding Melville Island for the last time in about the 1880s.⁶⁸ Travel to and from Melville Island by bark canoes occurred in stages, the Tiwi making use of one or more of the Vernon Islands as staging posts.⁶⁹ According to the Tiwi, the mainland was visited for two reasons, for the hunting of dugong and turtle in the waters of Shoal Bay and in pursuit of Larrakia and Woolner (Woolna) women to be taken home to the Tiwi Islands as wives for their captors.⁷⁰ Such raids led to conflict between the two groups and to retaliatory raids upon Melville Island by the Larrakia.⁷¹ On one occasion canoes used by the Tiwi to raid the mainland were destroyed by the Larrakia, forcing the Islanders to painfully return home using floating logs. This journey took three days.⁷² During another visit to the mainland, some Tiwi men saw a piece of history being made. As Jerry Kerinauia narrated the event, a number of Mandiimbula men from Melville Island, including Jerry's grandfather, Kerinauia, travelled by bark canoe to the mainland. They landed "topside, you know topside Darwin". This occurred before "Captain Cook came alonga Darwin". The Mandiimbula lay in the grass and watched "white men building a big fence". The Mandiimbula had paddled to the mainland before the establishment, in 1869, of the Fort Point camp on the site of Darwin. They had landed at the mouth of the Adelaide River and had watched the construction of Palmerston Stockade at Escape Cliffs in 1864.⁷³



The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

During one night a Woolner (Woolna) camp was attacked by Tiwi causing the deaths of many men.⁷⁴ The women were taken back to Melville Island. In 1953, Pilling recorded the living Tiwi descendants of three women taken from the mainland.⁷⁵ Tiwi oral history records the names of the other women together with the names of the men who ventured to the mainland.⁷⁶ The relationship between the Tiwi and their nearest Aboriginal neighbours was in no way peaceful and offered the Islanders no motive to acculturate their own culture.

WOMEN SEIZED FROM THE MAINLAND BY THE TIWI, NINETEENTH CENTURY (Partial List)

NAME	TAKEN FROM
Jaripi-ngulla	Larrakia country
Narlarka	Tree Point
Pawpawmo	Shoal Bay
Taripungnarla	Larrakia country
Timaeparla	Adelaide River
Timungarma	Cape Hotham. Taken before 1864 when Palmerston Stockade established

Fig. 9 Sources: Interviews with Cardo Kerinaiaua, Paru, 11/3/1964 and Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguuu, 2/10/1964. This list is by no means complete.

While this era of inter-indigenous conflict drew towards its close, on another front the Tiwi were exposed to a more persistent approach by European Australians. In response, the Tiwi continued to act aggressively towards outsiders and this attitude did not cease entirely for some years after a constant European presence was established in the islands. Permanent settlement on the Northern Territory mainland led to an acceleration of interest in the Tiwi islands, both by the Territory administration and private interests. From the mid 1870s a number of casual visitors and exploring parties appeared on and around the islands. Not all saw or made contact with the Tiwi, but where they did, hostilities always occurred. A sporting party from Palmerston (Darwin) had their game shooting interrupted by a band of Tiwi who "...poised their spears, but a shot over their heads soon dispersed them."⁷⁷ Some years had passed since Fort Dundas had been abandoned and by the time this incident occurred it is quite possible that Tiwi knowledge of firearms had been relegated to oral history. W.B. Wildey and others who landed at Luxmoore Head, on Melville Island, were not so lucky and "...were driven (out) by the natives." The Tiwi tell of the killing of a European by Turimpi Munkara near Port Hurd in the south-west of Bathurst Island.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, little more is known about this incident or when it occurred. Possibly the victim had landed from a small

vessel such as a lugger. If the killing took place before 1870 when Palmerston (Darwin) was permanently settled and the first Government Resident was appointed it is difficult to ascertain where it could have been reported.

E.O. Robinson, who was the pivotal figure in the European-Australian movement into the islands, made two forays there without even sighting the Tiwi. The first occurred in 1877, when a party, including Robinson, explored Apsley Strait.⁷⁹ During a cruise around the islands in 1884, another group, which included Robinson, the Duke of Manchester and the Government Resident of the Territory, J.L. Parsons, and his family, made two brief landings on the islands.⁸⁰ Similarly, E.W. Price, an earlier Government Resident, saw no Islanders when he visited the islands in about 1882. Several men from the government steamer *Palmerston* went ashore at Cape Keith in 1885, travelling several miles into the bush. Searcy, one of the party, wrote that,

*We saw no recent signs of niggers, and, no doubt, if they had been anywhere handy, we should have been made acquainted with the fact, for they had a bad name for being fierce and treacherous. Hardly ever did a party touch the shores of the island without being attacked, and this within forty miles of Port Darwin.*⁸¹

It is not possible to say whether any of these parties were observed by the Tiwi. However, a large expedition which crossed Melville Island in October, 1887, was closely observed and dogged by the Tiwi. Several refused gifts offered by the party. The expedition, led by Philip Saunders, and including Robinson and Parsons, came into conflict with the Tiwi, two of the party being injured in the first of several attacks.⁸² J.P. Hingston, a member of the expedition, concluded that

*It is evident that the natives regard the landing of white men on Melville Island as an invasion and they are determined to murder all who venture on what they consider their territory. All future visitors to Melville Island should carefully note this fact.*⁸³

While Hingston was aware that the Tiwi would fight to defend their territory, he nevertheless saw their character as “treacherous and murderous.” The Tiwi’s reputation was becoming well known. Earlier, in 1881, when requested to supply details of the natural resources and the “natives” of Melville Island, Government Resident Price replied that this was not possible due to the hostility of the Tiwi which had, at that time, prevented any exploration of the interior of the island. Neither had previous Government Residents been able to carry out such a trip. It was thought that it would take a well-armed party of fifteen to twenty Europeans to exterminate the Tiwi and gain possession of the island.⁸⁴ The official attitude of the time was not conducive to establishing friendly communication.

Parsons, who failed to support the Protectors of Aborigines in the Territory, was forthright and ethnocentric in his comments about the Islanders, writing that, “they are cowards, resent the intrusion of whites, and until they are familiarised with Europeans are not to be trusted and will not work.”⁸⁵ He evidently did not appreciate the guerrilla warfare indigenous mode of fighting, nor was he aware of the Tiwi employment of labour in the traditional sense. Parsons was also critical of the Tiwi in his official report, castigating them for attacking the expedition of 1887, rather than accepting the offered gifts. He concluded that the Islanders were “...utterly unreliable and incapable of appreciating kindness.”⁸⁶ The Tiwi’s aggressive reaction in opposing trespassers on their territory reflected the claims of traditional land tenure by mainland groups, who, said

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Parsons, regarded the land as their own, with fatal consequences. Comments by Parson, Hingston and others, criticising the Tiwi for defending their islands from trespassers reflect similar comments made about attacks upon explorers and settlers by mainland Aborigines. While acknowledging the natural reaction of people endangered by attacks by Aborigines and Islanders, it is clear that the authors of these statements believed firmly that European Australians rather than the traditional occupants were the true owners of the land.

Despite the well known hostility of the Tiwi, as early as 1877 five separate applications were lodged for pastoral leases on Melville Island.⁸⁷ The Minister responsible for the Northern Territory at the time, Ebenezer Ward, who had been at Palmerston Stockade, commented that the number and formidability of the Tiwi would lead to bloodshed if a mere cattle station was established on the island.⁸⁸ Eight years later the South Australian government made Bathurst and Melville Islands available for leases, repeating the offer in 1889 and again in 1892.⁸⁹ In the interim a Mr. C. Goodliff unsuccessfully sought to lease Melville Island in 1891.⁹⁰ Robinson made yet another visit to Melville Island in 1893, this time as leaseholder of the island.⁹¹ While he found plenty of buffalo around Cape Gambier, he "...met with rather a warm reception from the Natives."⁹² On 9 June 1893, *The Northern Territory Times* was able to report that Robinson and five companions escaped unscathed, for "...notwithstanding the terrible name which the island bears for the extreme savagery of its natives, the whole number were able to depart again with a whole skin". In 1894 Robinson again inspected buffalo numbers on Melville Island, but made no comment about whether he met any Tiwi.⁹³ Towards the end of that year, according to the *South Australian Register*, of 22 December 1894,

An aboriginal engaged by one of the pearling boats has died in the Palmerston Hospital from a spear wound received in an attack by the Melville Island black while the deceased and other natives were on the island cutting firewood.

The discovery of pearlshell off Melville Island in 1895 brought pearling luggers to work around the Tiwi Islands for many years, resulting in bloodshed at times, and, in later years, the prostitution of some Tiwi women.⁹⁴ The pearling beds most heavily worked in the 1880s and 1890s were those around the Tiwi Islands. Although there was some intercourse between the Tiwi and pearling crews, several men from luggers were killed in this period. Paddy Porkilari recalled how "*long time ago my father (Porkilari) and Matthias' father (Ulungura) killem two Japanese and one Larrakia alonga boat at Panarli (Cape Gambier). Porkilari killed the Japanese and Ulungura killed the Larrakia crewboy.*"⁹⁵ Through the silence of Aborigines and Islanders and stories that the murdered crews were accidentally drowned, some killings on the Northern Territory coast were never resolved. As late as 1905, a Japanese crewman from a lugger was speared on Melville Island but the report is not available.⁹⁶

Macassan contact with the Tiwi seemed to cease by 1890 and there were no Macassan shipwrecks on Melville Island after 1887. However, another type of trepanger operated around the islands before 1895. A Darwin-based Chinese seafarer, whom Islander oral history records as "Sim-ay", employed Tiwi labour for his operation, paying his workers with food, tobacco, nagas (loin cloths), knives, spoons and tomahawks.⁹⁷ If Tiwi oral history is accurate, "Sim-ay" established friendly relations with the Islanders he met, indicating that, under appropriate circumstances, the Tiwi were approachable. Oral history also speaks of two other Chinese trepangers, one named "Loo Pot", working off

Karslake Island, near Snake Bay, in the early part of the twentieth century but before the mission was established at Nguuu.⁹⁸ Evidence of inter-cultural contacts such these rests only with the memory of older Tiwi who have now passed on. Without the memories of these people and the stories passed down through oral history much of the ethnohistory recounted in this book would not be available.

Between 1705 and 1894 the Tiwi had intermittent, but sometimes lengthy, periods of contact with outside peoples. The majority of these ended in some form of conflict, while others were peaceful. The incidents in which the Tiwi obtained European or Asiatic food items were relatively few and far between, giving the Islanders little opportunity to develop a demand for such items. The major material influence on the Tiwi were steel tools, especially axes and tomahawks. In cultural terms, apart from an expansion of oral history to include stories of visitors from the outside world, the main influence appears to be the Indonesians. At the same time, this effect was somewhat limited in scope. The Tiwi did not endure the constant contact with the Macassans as occurred on the Arnhem Land coast or develop the high level of cultural influence that came out of constant contact. Biologically, too, the influx of genetic mixture from outside sources was limited in comparison with the incidence of Macassan genes in the Arnhem Land community. In addition, it must be emphasized that due to the location of the various Tiwi bands, whenever communication with alien cultures did take place, in each instance only a small number of Tiwi were involved.

The Islanders had resisted the opportunity to come to terms with the British at Fort Dundas and to familiarise themselves with available Europeans foods and goods. This contrasted with the situation around the newly established township of Palmerston (Darwin) and other European establishments such as mining and buffalo camps and cattle stations on the mainland. Drawn to these new centres, many mainland Aborigines were soon victims of European and Asian introduced diseases and illnesses, and of excessive drinking and poverty. Faced with social and health problems for which they had no cure, the Aborigines, especially those in Palmerston, quickly declined in numbers. The Tiwi, on the other hand, secure in their relative remoteness and protected to some degree by their reputation as fighters, remained safe from the hazards faced by their indigenous neighbours on the nearby mainland. They were not subjected to official punitive expeditions, imprisonment or executions as other groups, including those in Arnhem Land and the Daly River region, were.⁹⁹ They were able to continue to practise their traditional lifestyle which showed very little evidence of outside influences.

All of these circumstances were soon to change. A report in the *Northern Territory Times and Gazette* of 9 March 1895 that Robinson, with companions Joe Cooper and "Barney" Flynn and some Iwaidja assistants, were arranging to take up buffalo shooting operations on Melville Island heralded the approaching demise of this isolation. Although Robinson was the lessee of the island and the entrepreneur of the forthcoming venture, it was to be Cooper and the Iwaidja assistants who were to influence the Tiwi, and bear the weight of the Islanders' discontent with the buffalo shooters' presence and actions. At the same time, as Hart, Pilling and Goodale state, "the Tiwi were drawn out of their hostile insularity by curiosity and their desire for iron."¹⁰⁰ Within less than 25 years changes were to appear in the Islanders' culture and lifestyle, as well as in their attitude towards people from other traditions.

¹ Krastins, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-23; Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ² Macknight, C.C. *The Voyage to Marege: Macassan Trepangers in Northern Australia*, Carlton,: Melbourne University Press, 1976, p. 1; Macknight, C.C., Macassans and Aborigines in the Northern Territory, unpublished preliminary version of section of PhD thesis, 1968, p. 97. Berndt, R. and C., *Arnhem Land its History and its People*, Melbourne: F.W. Cheshire, 1954, pp. 14-122, offer a broad picture of this trade.
- ³ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 45; Morris, John, The Coming of the Macassans to the Islands of the Tiwi, unpublished paper, Darwin, 1967, p. 2; Macknight (1976), *op. cit.* p. 34; Harney, W.E., "Melville Island". In *Walkabout*, January, 1947, p. 31, states that the "early Malay traders" knew Melville Island as Yoy Yoy. Pilling (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 40.
- ⁴ See Berndt and Berndt (1954), *op. cit.*, pp. 43 - 90, for a survey of the Macassan experience in Arnhem Land and how this brought major cultural changes to the Aborigines there, ranging from dugout canoes to alcohol and artistic and religious influence, to alterations to the local languages and dialects.
- ⁵ Spillett, Peter, Aboriginal Makassan Relationships, Melville Island Research, 27-31/8/1989, unpublished report to Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, 1/9/1989.
- ⁶ Campbell to Macleay, *HRA*, 1923, p. 713. Spillett, Peter, "Marege - a second home to the Macassans". In *Northern Territory News*, 28/10/1989, pp. 20-21, refers to Melville Island as Pulau Amba or Slave Island.
- ⁷ Macknight, C.C., Macassans and Aborigines in the Northern Territory, unpublished preliminary version of section of PhD thesis, 1968, p. 4.
- ⁸ Campbell, *op. cit.*, pp. 155, 161.
- ⁹ Macknight, C.C. The Macassans: A Study of the Early Trepang Industry Along the Northern Territory Coast, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1969, pp. 111, 328.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 112; Campbell to Macleay, *HRA*, 1923, p. 712, however, refers to a large Macassan establishment surrounded by a stockade as a protection against Cobourg Peninsula Aborigines.
- ¹¹ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 46.
- ¹² Davidson, D.S., "Northwestern Australia and The Question Of Influences From The East Indies". In *American Oriental Society Journal*, Vol. 58, 1938, p. 73.
- ¹³ Spillett (27-31/8/1989), *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- ¹⁴ Meston, *op. cit.*; Allen, *op. cit.*, p. 299.
- ¹⁵ Mountford, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
- ¹⁶ Hart, C.W.M., and Pilling, A.R., *The Tiwi of North Australia*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960, p. 98. The Indonesian vessel is spelt "prow", "prau" and "proa" by different authors.
- ¹⁷ Simpson, Colin, *Adam in Ochre*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1956, p. 130.
- ¹⁸ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 60.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Paddy Porkilari, Nguuiu, 16/2/1965.
- ²⁰ King, PP., *op. cit.*, p. 240.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p. 239.
- ²² Hill (1/1/1944), *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- ²³ *Bathurst Island Mission Records*, Director of Native Affairs to Superintendent, Garden Point Mission, 16/2/1948; Personal observations and discussions with Tiwi informants and mission staff, Nguuiu, 1960-1965 and 1995; Pye, J. *The Tiwi Islands*, Darwin: Catholic Missions/ Colemans Printing, 1985, p. 7.

The Widening World - Indonesians to Australians

- ²⁴ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 161; Macknight (1969), *op. cit.*, p. 111; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- ²⁵ Macknight (1969), *op. cit.*, pp. 110- 111; Spillett (1/9/1989), *op. cit.*, map; Spillett (28/10/1989), *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- ²⁶ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 46; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 8; Spillett (1/9/1989), *op. cit.*, p. 1; *The South Australian Register*, "Romantic Northern Australia", 27/5/1897, p. 6.
- ²⁷ Spillett (28/10/1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.
- ²⁸ Spillett (1/9/1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 2, 3, 5; Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 6, 8, 10; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 7. Interview with Tiwi informants John Baptist Pupangmirri, Barry Puruntatameri and Cyril Timaepatua, 6/11/1995, and with Robert Tipungwuti, 8/11/1995.
- ²⁹ Interview with Jimmy Illatumi, Paru, 21/6/1963.
- ³⁰ Interview with Alan Pupajua, Nguiu, 27/12/1963. The story has been translated from Tiwi pidgin English.
- ³¹ Evans, Nicholas, "Macassan Loanwords in Top End Languages". In *Australian Journal of Linguistics*, Vol. 12, No. 1, June 1992, p. 48.
- ³² Spillett (28/10/1989), *op. cit.*, p. 20.
- ³³ Spillett (1/9/1989), *op. cit.*, p. 4; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Morris, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
- ³⁴ Interview with Jimmy Illatumi; through Bismark Kerinauia and Isadore Fernando, Paru, 19/6/1963.
- ³⁵ Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Spillett (1/9/1989), *op. cit.*, p. 5; Interview with Robert Tipungwuti, Nguiu, 5/11/1995.
- ³⁶ Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 7, 12, 15; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- ³⁷ Office of the Minister for Education, South Australia, no. 346, 1882, E.O. Robinson to Government Resident of the Northern Territory, 12/2/1882 and 30/3/1882; South Australian Parliamentary Papers (Hereafter SAPP). 1887. no. 53. Appendices, *Half-Yearly Report on the Northern Territory to December 31. 1886*, p. 11, E.O. Robinson to Alfred Searcy, 9/1/1887.
- ³⁸ Searcy, Report to the Collector of H.M. Customs, 22/1/1884, p. 14.
- ³⁹ Report, Alfred Searcy to the Collector of H.M. Customs, 22/1/1884, pp. 13-14.
- ⁴⁰ Interview with Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 18/2/1965. Jerry also depicted the incident on a bark painting which is now in the possession of the writer.
- ⁴¹ Interviews with Paw Paw Puruntatameri and Isadore Fernando, Nguiu, 1/2/1964; Harney, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91. Harney used the spellings "Muragualaki" and "Mooragulake". A Tiwi wooden carving of Murugualaki is in the possession of the writer.
- ⁴² Interview with Tiwi informants Alan Pupajua and Reg Tipiloura, Nguiu, 27/12/1963.
- ⁴³ *Northern Territory News*, 28/3/1963, 9/1/1964, 23/1/1969, 25/2/1970, 26/2/1971.
- ⁴⁴ Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 73; Macknight (1969), *op. cit.*, p. 328.
- ⁴⁵ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 60; J. Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 3; Basedow, *op. cit.*, p. 305.
- ⁴⁶ Macknight (1976), *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- ⁴⁷ Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-74; Basedow, *op. cit.*, pp. 303-305.
- ⁴⁸ Macknight (1969), *op. cit.*, p. 112. Macknight (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 25.
- ⁴⁹ Pilling (1958), *op. cit.*, p. 304.
- ⁵⁰ Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 7; Interview with John Baptist Pupangmirri, 14/11/1995.
- ⁵¹ Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 24; Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

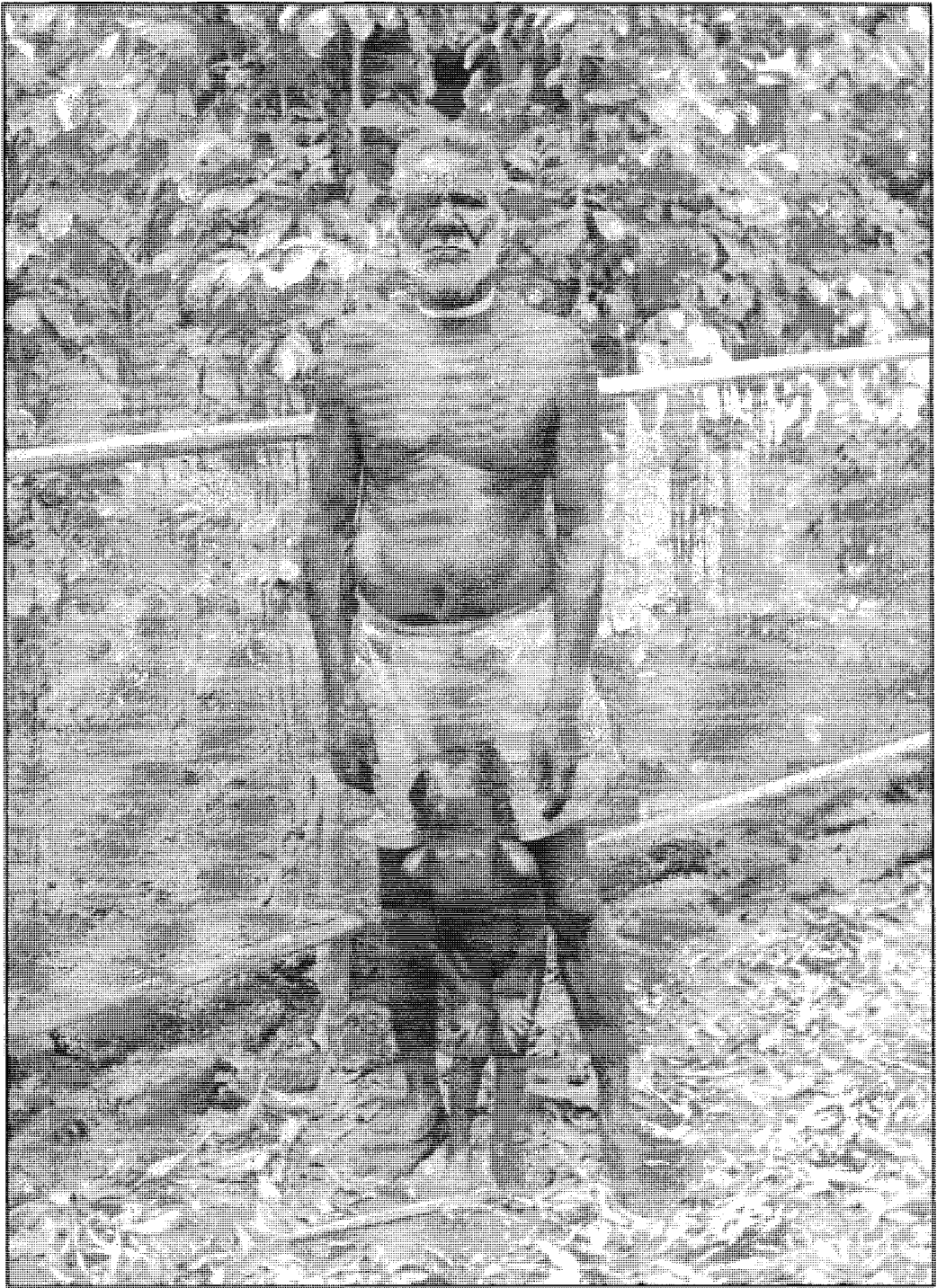
- ⁵² Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 23; Basedow, *op. cit.*, p. 323 and plates xix and xx.
- ⁵³ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 228.
- ⁵⁴ Basedow, *op. cit.*, p. 319.
- ⁵⁵ Worms, *op. cit.*, p. 168; Macknight (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 39, refers to a mortuary practice in Eastern Arnhem Land, of erecting a model of a Macassan prau mast, usually with a flag.
- ⁵⁶ Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-67; Spillett (1/9/1989), *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4; Gsell, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
- ⁵⁷ Macknight (1968), *op. cit.*, p. 112.
- ⁵⁸ Osborne, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
- ⁵⁹ Evans, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
- ⁶⁰ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 239.
- ⁶¹ Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- ⁶² Stokes, J. L., *Discoveries in Australia: With an Account of the Coasts and Rivers Explored and Surveyed During the Voyage of H.M.S. Beagle in the Years 1837-38-39-40-41-42-43 By Command of the Lord Commissioners of the Admiralty*, Volume 1, London: Boone, 1846, pp. 428-429.
- ⁶³ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, pp. 106-107; SAPP. 1887. No. 54. *Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory to 30/6/1886*, p. 17; SAPP. 1887. No 54. *Half Yearly Report on the Northern Territory to 31/12/1886*, p. 16; SAPP. 1900. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory 1899*, p. 14.
- ⁶⁴ SAPP. 1887. *Government Resident's Half-Yearly Report on the Northern Territory to 30/6/1886*, p. 9.
- ⁶⁵ Mountford, (1958) *op. cit.*, p. 16; Hart, *op. cit.*, p. 170. Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 11, state that "only an occasional raid" on the mainland occurred, and contact "with mainland aborigines was minimal before 1890."
- ⁶⁶ Gsell, F.X., *My 50 Years of Mission Life*, unpublished Ms, undated, p. 76; Basedow, *op. cit.*, p. 291; Basedow, (1925) *op. cit.*, p. 163; Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 236; Foelsche, Paul, "Notes on the Aborigines of North Australia", *Transactions of the Royal Society of South Australia*, Vol. v, 1882, p. 17.
- ⁶⁷ Interview with Matthias Ulungura and Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 1964.
- ⁶⁸ Pilling (1958), *op. cit.*, p. 234; Interview with Jerry Kerinauia, Nguui, 2/10/1964.
- ⁶⁹ Interview with Don Tipiamutta Hocking and Sugarbag Wonaeamirri, Paru, Melville Island, 10/10/1964.
- ⁷⁰ Interviews with Cardo (Kartu) Kerinauia, Paru, Melville Island, 11/3/1964 and Jerry Kerinauia, Nguui, 2/10/1964; Harney (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 101.
- ⁷¹ Interviews with Jerry Kerinauia, Nguui, 2/10/1964, and Matthias Ulungura and Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 1964.
- ⁷² Interview with Jerry Kerinauia, Nguui, 2/10/1964.
- ⁷³ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁴ Bradshaw, Joseph, "The North Coast of Arnhem Land", *Victorian Geographical Journal*, Vol. 23, 1905, p. 13.
- ⁷⁵ Pilling (1958), *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- ⁷⁶ Interviews with Cardo (Kartu) Kerinauia, Paru, 11/3/1964 and Jerry Kerinauia, Nguui, 2/10/1964.

- ⁷⁷ Wildey, W.B., *Australasia and the Oceanic Region*, Melbourne: George Robertson, 1876, p. 81.
- ⁷⁸ Interview with Tipperary Tipiloura, Kanta Tipiloura, Benedict Munkara and other Tikalauila, Nguui, 1961.
- ⁷⁹ *South Australian Register*, (27/5/1897), *op. cit.*, p. 583.
- ⁸⁰ *Ibid*, Anon, *Bathurst Island. Northern Territory of South Australia*, Melbourne, (no publishing details), 1897, p. 10.
- ⁸¹ Searcy, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
- ⁸² SAPP. 1888, no. 53. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1887*, pp. 11-13; South Australian State Records (Hereafter, SASR), GRS9. Vol. 1. *Newspaper Cuttings Collected by the Office of the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory*, newspaper not identified, 17/11/1887.
- ⁸³ Hingston, J.P., "Exploration of Melville Island", *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Australia*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 1938, p. 163.
- ⁸⁴ Reid, G., *A Picnic with the Natives*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990, pp. 97-98.
- ⁸⁵ Anon, *Bathurst Island*, p. 13.
- ⁸⁶ SAPP. 1890. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1889*, p. 9.
- ⁸⁷ SASR, GRS10/A1829-A2628. Microfilm Roll 4 - A20037.38.1877 - Lands Office Clerk to Government Resident of the Northern Territory, 22/4/1877.
- ⁸⁸ Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
- ⁸⁹ SASR,. GRS1/574/1891 - Plan shewing (sic) pastoral leases and claims in the Northern Territory of South Australia, 1885; SASR,. GRS1/370/1904 - Sale of pastoral leases, 20/3/1889; South Australian Government Gazette, no. 29, 30/6/1892, p. 1495.
- ⁹⁰ SASR., GRS I, Title 574/1891, no. 574, 1891, Government Resident of the Northern Territory to Minister of Education, 20/8/1891.
- ⁹¹ *Northern Territory Times*, 12/5/1893 and 9/6/1893; *South Australian Government Gazette*, no. 39, 7/9/1893, p. 686. *South Australian Register*, (27/5/1897), *op. cit.*, p. 5 gives the year as 1892.
- ⁹² SASR. GRG19. Series 4. 1890-1898. Government Resident of the Northern Territory to Dr. E.C. Stirling, 25/1/1894.
- ⁹³ *South Australian Register*, *op. cit.*
- ⁹⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 27/11/1895; SAPP. 1896. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1895*, p. 20; SAPP. 1897. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory. 1896*, p. 9; SAPP. 1901. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1900*, p. 4; SAPP. 1905. *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1904*, p. 5; Basedow, *op. cit.*, p. 293; Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, pp. 179, 215.
- ⁹⁵ Interview with Paddy Porkilari, Nguui, 16/2/1965.
- ⁹⁶ SASR, GRS10/14060/1905 - 14400/1905. Microfilm roll 41.
- ⁹⁷ Interview with Alan Pupajua, Nguui, 27/12/1963.
- ⁹⁸ Interview with Malaccajanni (Malacca Jack) Tipiluntiana , Nguui, 13/2/1964.
- ⁹⁹ Such punishments occurred in Arnhem Land and the Daly River region as in other parts of Australia. See for instance, Egan, Ted, *Justice All Their Own*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996, pp. 85-101, 177-189. Thomson, Donald, *Donald Thomson in Arnhem Land*, South Yarra: Curry O'Neil, 1983, pp. 19-25; Markus, Andrew, *From the Barrel*

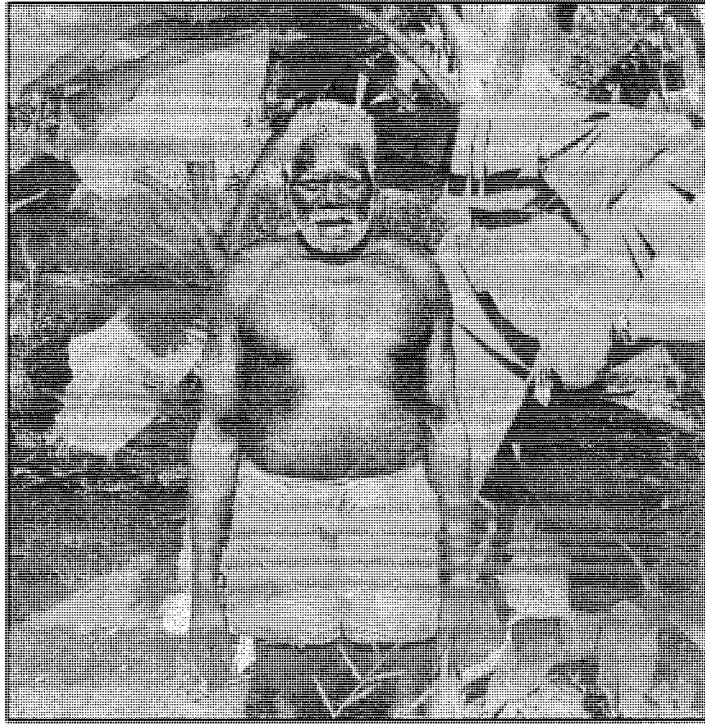
The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

of a Gun. The Oppression of the Aborigines, 1860-1900, West Melbourne: Victorian Historical Association, 1974, pp. 12-34.

¹⁰⁰ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 100.



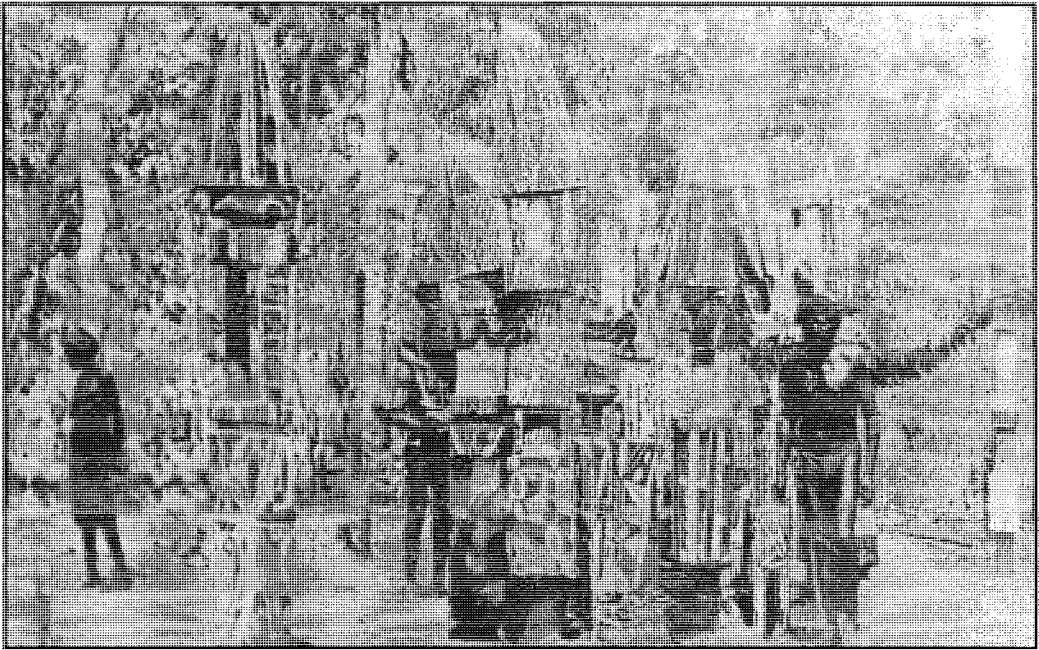
1. *The late Jerry Kerinaia, keeper of Tiwi oral history.*



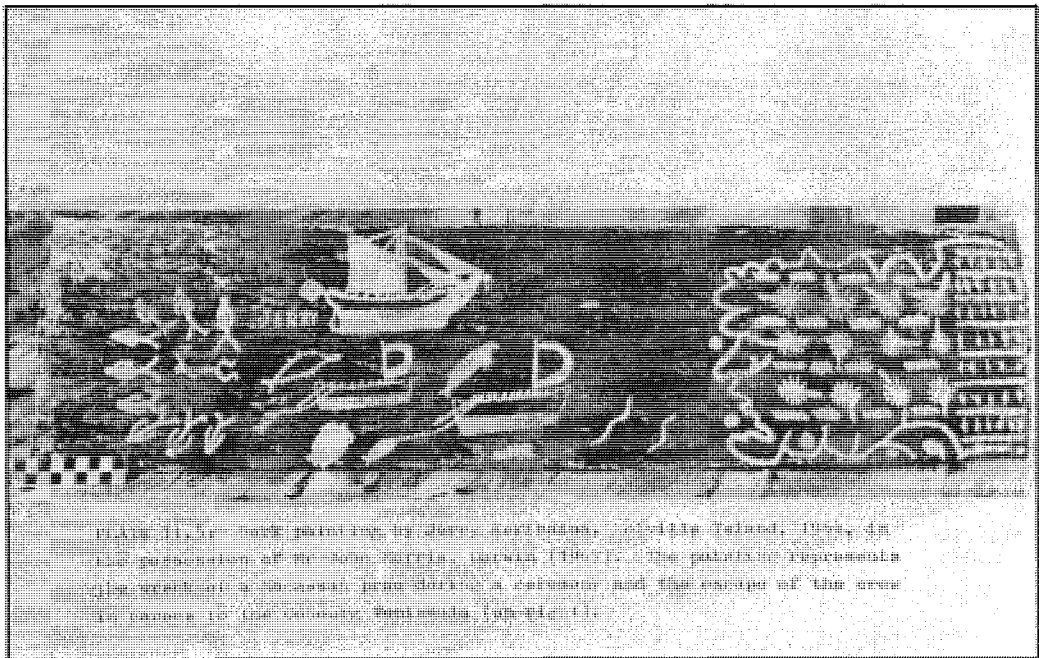
2A. The late Albert Kulappaku Croker, keeper of Iwaidja - Tiwi oral history.



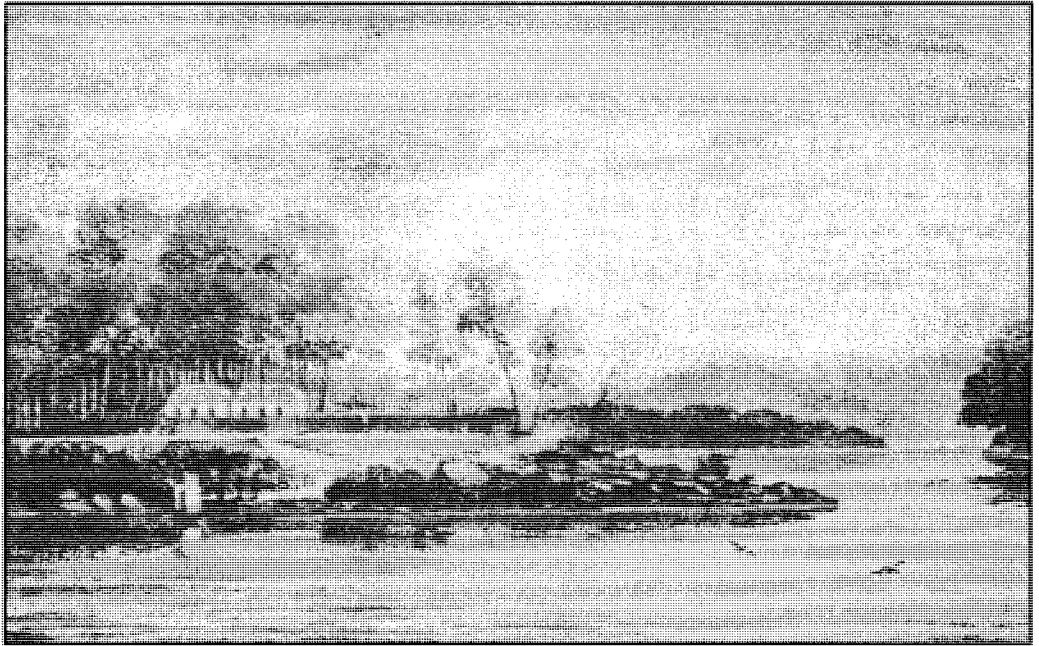
2B. The late Don Tipiamutta Hocking with his painting of the Purukupali story



3. *Pukamuni Poles, Bathurst Island.*



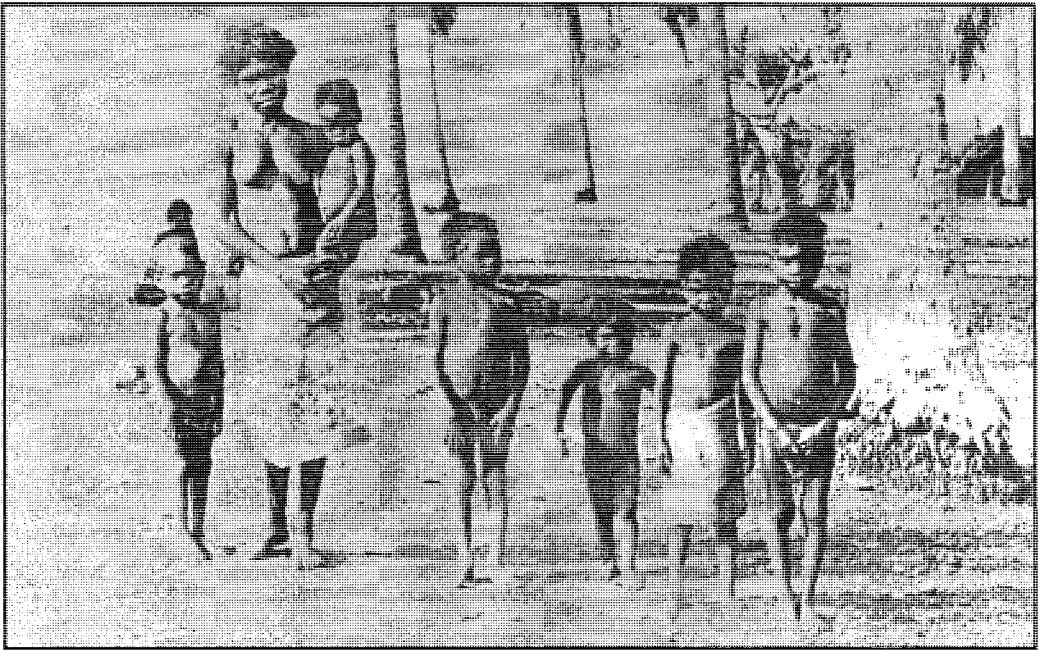
4. *Bark painting of Macassan proa wrecked on Melville Island.*
Artist Jerry Kerinaia.



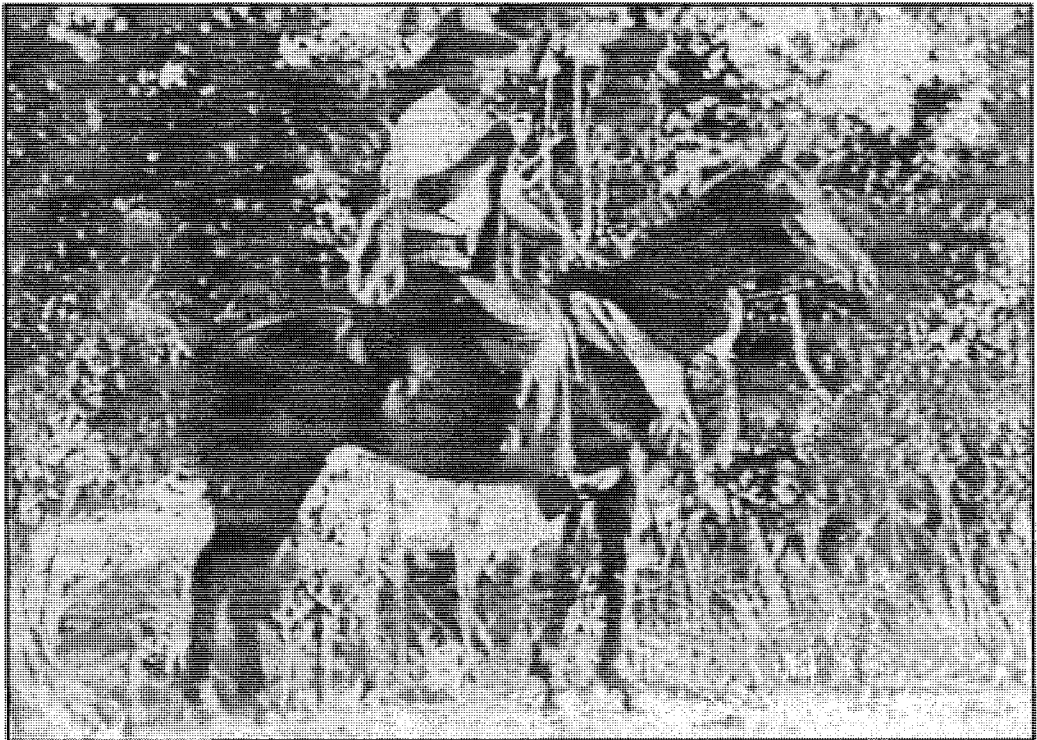
5. Fort Dundas, Melville Island. (Courtesy Mitchell Library)



6. Tiwi men seated in camp, Melville Island, 1912. (Courtesy Museum of Victoria).



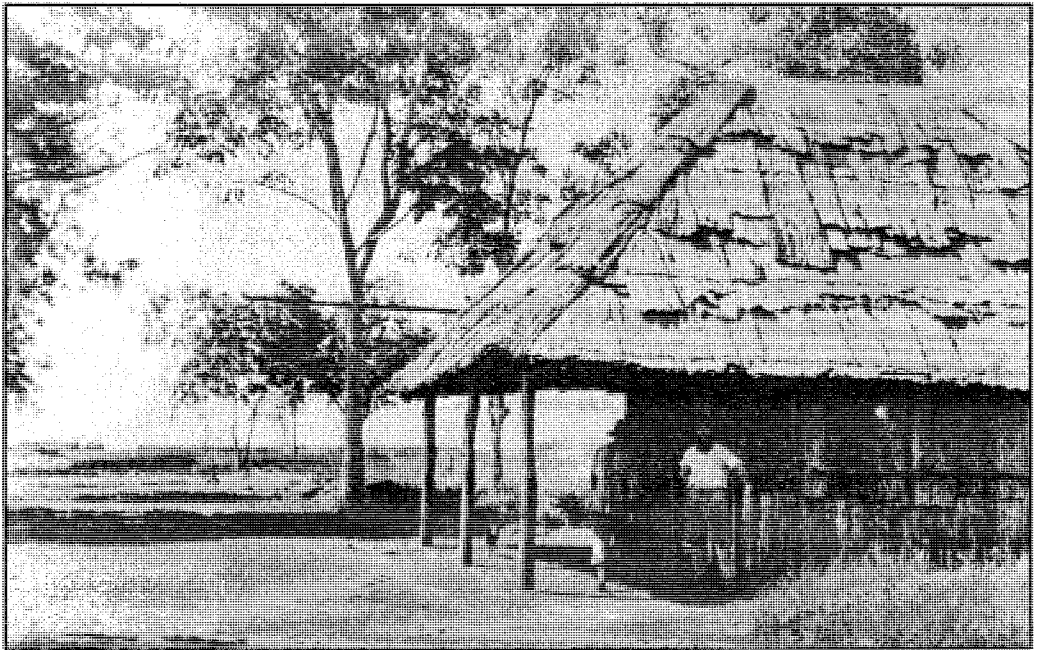
7. *Tiwi woman and children on beach at Nguiu.*



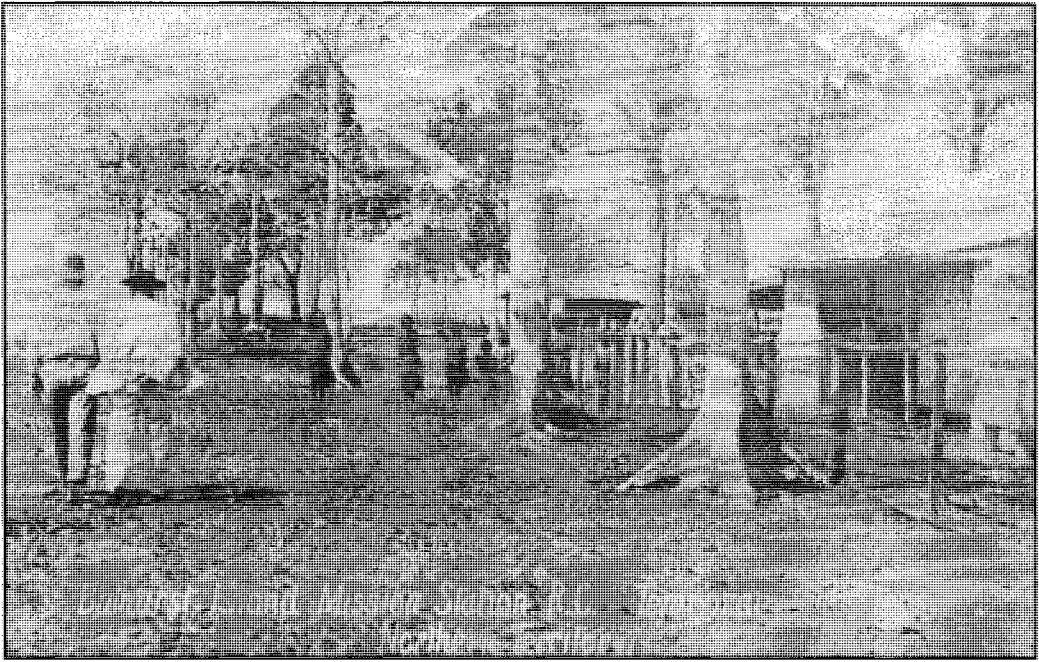
8A. *Joe Cooper on horseback. (Courtesy Northern Territory Library).*



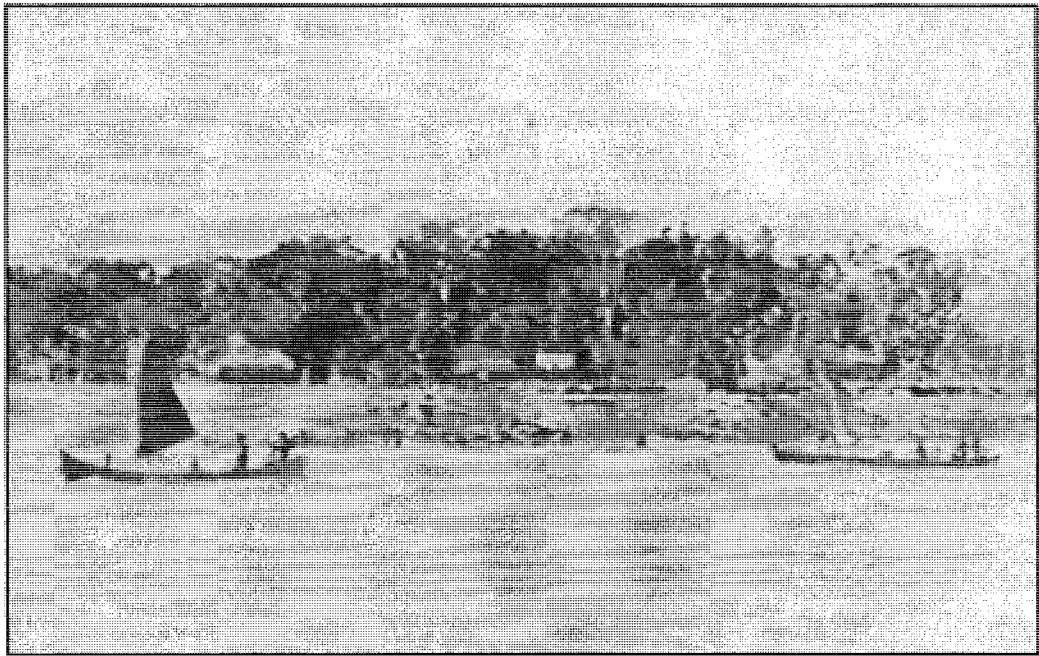
8B. Harry Cooper's grave, Darwin.



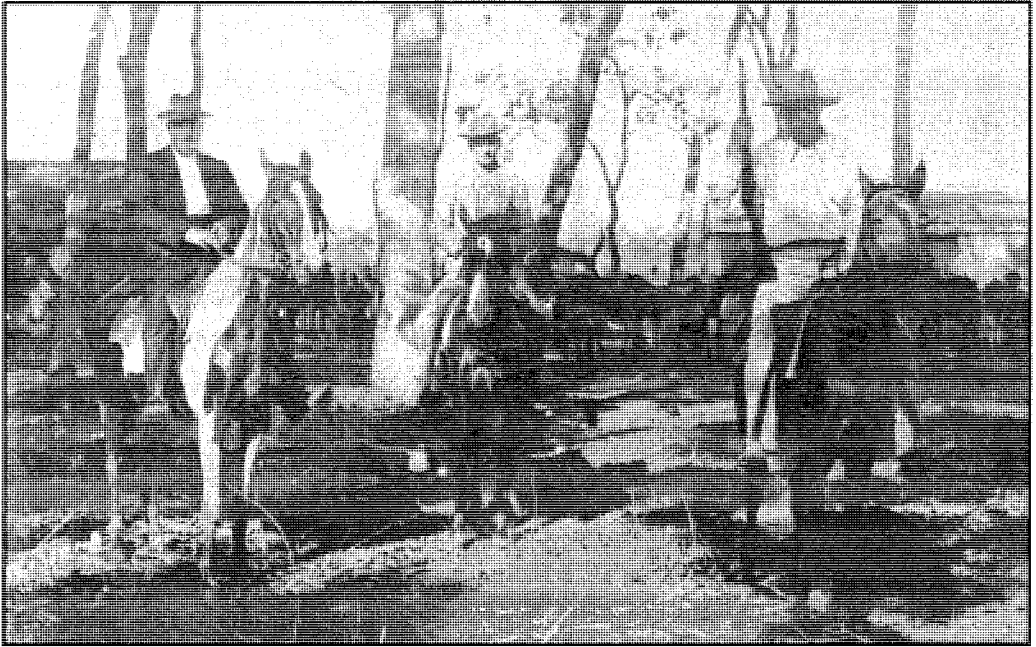
9. Early mission building, Nguuu, 1912. Father Gsell on right. (Courtesy Museum of Victoria).



10. Joe Cooper and Father Gsell (wearing coat) at Nguiu. Sisters inside fence, with, apparently, children from the mainland.



11. Dugout canoes off Paru. (Courtesy Northern Territory Library).



12. D.M. Sayers, John Gilruth and Joe Cooper. (Courtesy Museum of Victoria).



13. Father (later Bishop) F.X. Gsell. (Courtesy Northern Territory Archives Service and the Bro. J. Pye Collection).



14. *Tiwi children in dugout canoe off Paru. (Courtesy Northern Territory Library).*

CHAPTER FIVE

The Buffalo Shooters - The Opening Door

(1895 - 1916)

For three hundred years, or possibly longer, the Tiwi had intermittent contact with people representing various cultures and economies in the outside world. When intercultural conflict did occur the Tiwi were demonstrating their belief that their islands had been created for them alone, and for nobody else. Whatever the circumstances of each contact, however, the Islanders derived from the visitors a desire for a limited range of foreign materials, but this was not sufficient to change their culture. In the closing years of the nineteenth century a new and potent force entered their lives. The main face of this thrust, an Australian buffalo shooter, became so important a part of Tiwi ethnohistory that his time in the islands deserves special attention. His position in Tiwi oral history is an ambiguous one. Nevertheless, the accuracy of the memory of the elderly Islanders and its importance in clarifying grey and dubious aspects in respect to this era makes this an important tool of research.

The arrival of a small group of newcomers in 1895 not only opened the way for the Tiwi to fulfil their desire for metal tools but also modified their customary culture to a small degree. It was to change the direction of their history. The attraction for the newcomers was the Melville Island buffalo population. In 1873, John Crossman unsuccessfully applied for permission to shoot buffalo on the island.¹ By 1882 Meston estimated that the population of these introduced animals to be about 25,000 beasts.² Over the years since then, debate has occurred as to whether buffalo shooter Robert Joel (Joe) Cooper or the group of Iwaidja people who accompanied him, and were called *Ponga-tarilla* by the Islanders, was the main agent of change in Tiwi society.

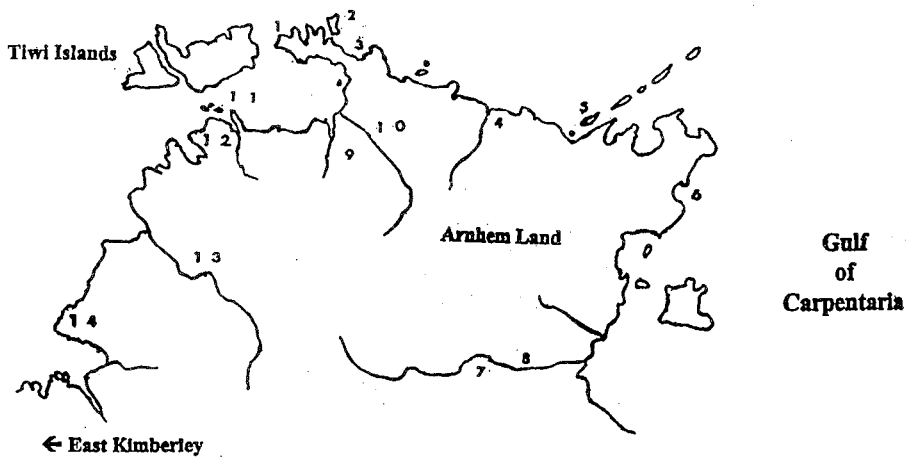
This debate has not been assisted by the romantic and legendary story of Cooper, built up by the inaccuracies, exaggerations and misinformation in the writings of a number of academics and serious authors, as well as numerous journalists and more popular writers.³ The factual story of the Cooper period in the history of the Tiwi is profound and intriguing without any embellishments. It straddles the transfer of the administration of Aboriginal Affairs from South Australia to the Commonwealth, the ending of isolation for the Tiwi people, the gradual lessening of aggression among the Islanders, and the pursuit of a proposal to establish a mission station in the Tiwi Islands.

The romantic but often inaccurate version of the relationship between Cooper and the Tiwi people began with Walter Baldwin Spencer and, more especially, G. H. Sunter, and has since developed by other writers. While the apocryphal story of this period in the

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Tiwi history varies from author to author, in summary Joe Cooper and his brother George Henry (Harry) are supposed to have landed on Melville Island, in some versions unarmed. Harry, it is said, was killed and Joe injured by the Tiwi before they managed to escape to the mainland, taking with them several island girls or women. After learning the Tiwi language from the “lubras”, Cooper returned to Melville Island where he successfully fought two Tiwi contenders to become the king of the “five tribes” of Melville Island. One author goes as far as to describe him as “the only white man ever to become the absolute ruler of a tribe of aborigines”.⁴ Thereafter, Cooper ruled over the Islanders, pursuing and punishing, in indigenous style, any tribal law-breaker.

Tiwi and Iwaidja informants who were alive at the time deny that any such duel for the “throne” took place or that the Tiwi considered Cooper their king.⁵ The islands’ social and political culture did not allow for a paramount leader. As discussed earlier, the Tiwi community is comprised of one tribe composed of a number of territorial bands. Members of each band bore primary allegiance to that band. Consequently, there could be no clash of any kind by hopeful contenders for such a form of leadership. Moreover, several of the weapons used in the alleged duel were not used by the Tiwi people. Cooper, in fact, appears to have been called “king” of the island in later years by some residents of the Northern Territory, in all probability due to his lengthy experience among the Tiwi. Baldwin Spencer referred to him as being “venerated as a sort of Rajah”, while *The Age* referred to him 1911 as “the white chief”.⁶ If there is any basis to the story of the duel and the pursuit of law-breakers this could possibly have evolved out of Cooper’s adventures on the mainland but this is difficult to substantiate. The alleged fight for the “throne” appeared initially in an article by Sunter in 1935. Several years later he expanded on this theme, detailing the claim to leadership as being given to him by Cooper.⁷



MAP 10

LOCATION OF TIWI ISLANDS IN RELATION TO ARNHEM LAND AND DALY RIVER REGION

KEY	
1. Cape Don	8. Roper River Mission
2. Croker Island	9. Kakadu (Gagudju)
3. Malay Bay	10. East Alligator River
4. Maningrida	11. Vernon Islands
5. Elcho Island	12. Palmerston (Darwin)
6. Caledon Bay	13. Daly River
7. Roper River	14. Port Keats

The Buffalo Shooters - The Opening Door

“Jokubber” (Jokupper), as the Islanders call Cooper, is said to have legally married a Tiwi woman. In fact, Alice Rose Cooper, Aboriginal name Mara-oldain, was an Iwaidja woman from Port Essington, of whom Spencer wrote, ‘...though not, I believe legally married to her she is to intents and purposes his wife, and is treated as such.’⁸ Stating that Alice had saved Cooper’s life on two occasions, Gilruth commented that,

*It is only fair to Cooper to add that though he lives with a lubra, he behaves to her in such a manner that it was only recently I became aware she is not legally his wife...She was always addressed as Mrs. Cooper.*⁹

Alice was not a princess, nor was her indigenous name Malo-alo. The romanticism that grew into the legend of the Coopers also served to strengthen the myth of the Tiwi.

South Australian-born Cooper and his brother Harry were engaged in buffalo shooting in the Cobourg Peninsula and the Alligator Rivers region of the Northern Territory in the period around 1890.¹⁰ Prominent in the same region was pioneer buffalo shooter E. O. Robinson who had an interest in the Tiwi Islands, had taken part in several expeditions and finally purchased two pastoral leases covering the whole of Melville Island in 1892.¹¹ Various writers incorrectly state that Robinson considered his acquisition to be a “white elephant”, being rarely, if ever, able to visit it due to the Melville Island Aborigines being “the fiercest in all Australia”.¹² The leases, according to these writers, were sold either to Joe Cooper or to both of the Cooper brothers.

Joe Cooper accompanied Robinson on his visit to Melville Island in 1893 to ascertain the viability of establishing a buffalo shooting industry there. Robinson does not mention whether one or the other of the Coopers went with him on his “final preliminary inspection” of the island in 1894, although Briggs and several other writers state that Joe did.¹³ Tiwi oral history is silent about this visit. The buffalo on Melville Island permitted Robinson to declare his pastoral leases stocked as required by law. In April, 1895, he began to move a team of shooters and their horses to the island. This team, comprising Joe Cooper and J. (Barney) Flynn, together with a small band of Iwaidja people from the Malay Bay-Port Essington area, risked “the fabled ferocity of the” Tiwi.¹⁴ Tiwi informants claim that the Iwaidja, who referred to the Melville Islanders as the *Wunjuk*, came at a later date than Cooper. This can possibly be explained by the newspaper report that the schooner *Flowerdale* left Darwin early in May “with the last of the party”.¹⁵ The Tiwi resented the intrusion. In recounting their first experience with these newcomers the Tiwi not only list the names of the people who first observed the buffalo shooters, but they also say that they were afraid when they first heard the gunfire of the shooters and they fled. One informant mimicked his father squatting like a wallaby watching one of Cooper’s men striking a match, then fleeing in terror upon seeing the flame. Cooper, according to the Tiwi, tried to catch some of the Islanders, giving them (“plenty presents”) such as calico for lap laps and tomahawks.

Early in June, 1895, Robinson reported that little trouble had been experienced with the Tiwi although Flynn had had a narrow escape when a spear grazed his shoulder. The persistence of the shooters,

*notwithstanding the animosity of the savages, seems to have caused the natives to retreat to quieter parts of the country. So little is feared from the blacks that the party allow their horses to graze at will.*¹⁶

A few days later this all changed. A headline in the *South Australian Register* on 26 June 1895 announced “OUTRAGE BY NATIVES. A BUFFALO-HUNTER SPEARED”. Two

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

days later the *Northern Territory Times* carried the headline "Spearing of J. Cooper on Melville Island". The newspaper articles, and several authors in later years, carried different versions of how Cooper was speared, some including an attack upon Flynn.¹⁷ Cooper, according to his account, rode out early in the morning and was speared in the shoulder from behind. He dismounted and broke off the spear but had to walk back to his camp after firing a shot at twenty or more Tiwi whom he saw about a hundred yards from him. An Iwaidja shooter, Ngaringari, who was present at the time, said that Cooper was riding through the bush when he saw a Tiwi man named Porkilari. He rode after Porkilari to make peace with him. Cooper caught the Islander's wrist as the latter dodged behind a tree. Porkilari speared Cooper in the shoulder from the other side of the tree.¹⁸ This recall by the Iwaidja man is verified by a Mandiimbula elder: "Jokubber (Joe Cooper) on horseback. (He) chased and tried to catch Porkilari. Porkilari run behind tree. He speared Jokubber in (the) shoulder."¹⁹

It is unclear if Alice Rose was with him at the time of the spearing, but she may have been on the island. Popular fiction has Cooper being helped to defend himself by a "Mala-ola" girl after the spearing, before the girl and her mother took him by canoe towards Darwin, with a ship picking them up the way.²⁰ However, this has been strongly denied by Tiwi elders. Customs Officer Alfred Searcy arrived at the shooters' camp on the morning of the spearing and helped to evacuate Cooper to Darwin on the lugger *Beatrice*. Searcy wrote that on that occasion "We went inland for a few miles, but never a sign of a nigger did we see."²¹ Pilling states that Porkilari was shot immediately after the spearing.²² If that is so he was certainly not killed, as Porkilari was speared, about 1903, in a payback killing.²³ Soon after the attack on Cooper an Iwaidja was injured in a spear attack upon a group of the Malay Bay (Iwaidja) men.²⁴ He later died after evacuation to Darwin. According to Searcy, the Iwaidja "were in mortal dread of the island blacks."²⁵ Three weeks after being wounded Cooper was back at work on the island. Gradually a small number of the Islanders developed a friendship with Cooper. But there were others whose attitude towards the buffalo shooters was different. Some say that Porkilari attacked Cooper because he had shot and wounded Porkilari's uncle, U-renchi, in the left arm. U-renchie had cried out that he had "rifle in arm."²⁶ One group of Tiwi informants stated that he was dancing in Tiwi fashion with his hands held out like the wings of a plane when he was shot in the arm by the Iwaidja rather than by Cooper.²⁷

The horses used by the buffalo shooters were the first seen by the Tiwi. Despite Robinson's earlier comment that the horses were free from attack several were speared by the Tiwi.²⁸ More importantly, if elderly Tiwi people are correct, about six island men and women were shot in disputes over Tiwi women, at least some of these occurring in 1896.²⁹ Pilling argues that the

*Iwaidja, through their application of force with guns, commenced the first alterations in the pre-1900 system of social control. The islanders learned through experience that what ... Cooper or an Iwaidja considered an offense would be punished.*³⁰

In the view of the Tiwi, Barney Flynn was responsible for these deaths occurring. It is difficult to ascertain whether this allegation is correct or not, although there is every reason to believe that the Iwaidja, whom the Tiwi called the *Ponga-tarilla*, may have been acting of their own volition. Flynn was also said to have shot and wounded a Tiwi man named Uroongee near Cape Gambier. Uroongee threw spears at the buffalo

shooter when Flynn tried to “make him quiet”.³¹ In the words of Paddy Porkilari, the son of the man who speared Cooper, “Barney Flynn bin kill lotta people. (Flynn) go along bush, (people) run away.”³² Flynn later died on the mainland after being bitten by a snake.

The apocryphal version of Cooper’s time on Melville Island has him retreating to the mainland following his spearing and taking with him a small group of Tiwi hostages.³³ In reality the buffalo shooting operations continued until 1896, during which year the team moved further north to different areas and several new parties of shooters began operations on the island.³⁴ It was during this period that some of the horse spearing occurred. The *Northern Territory Times* of 19 June, 1896, stated that the “Melville Islanders have been showing their teeth again”, a few days ago “one of J. Flynn’s horses (being) speared by the unfriendly savages”. A few months earlier a prospecting party of three men with 15 horses who ventured to the Tiwi Islands at the end of 1895 saw only a few “blacks” who gave them no trouble.³⁵

In 1896 Robinson decided to rest the buffalo population.³⁶ When the shooters’ camp was evacuated some men remained to look after the horses until Harry Cooper and others arrived to ship them back to the mainland. According to Tiwi elder Jerry Kerinaiaua, several of the horses were speared before they could be evacuated.³⁷ Joe Cooper had a group of about eleven Tiwi, including several babies, taken by lugger to the Cobourg Peninsula.³⁸ The group were from those Mandiimbula who had joined Cooper’s camp and from these he learnt the Tiwi language.³⁹ Krastins suggests that his efforts makes it clear that Cooper intended returning to Melville Island.⁴⁰ The report of an investigation in 1915 into incidents in the islands included the comment that “...some women and boys (men) were no doubt removed by Cooper previous to his permanent settlement on the island, when he returned to settle on the island, these women and boys were brought back.”⁴¹

Whether Cooper learnt the Tiwi language with the idea of revisiting the buffalo herds of Melville Island is difficult to say. The lease of Melville Island was passed to Michael O’Connor in the next couple of years and in 1900 Robinson left the Northern Territory only to repurchase the leases in 1902.⁴² At the end of June 1905 Robinson recommenced the shooting operations on his leases employing a larger crew of shooters, again under Joe Cooper and including his brother Harry.⁴³ Tiwi oral history says that Robinson came to Melville Island in the lugger *Essington*, bringing with him Samuel Ingeruintamirri, one of the Tiwi who had gone to the Cobourg Peninsula. In the words of Jerry Kerinaiaua, Samuel

*... leave dinghy alonga sandbank, walk up sing out. He said “me Samuel, me Samuel”. All run, cry, cry, killem selves. Samuel gave them smoke, flour, calico, everything, knife, tomahawk. Give it, give it, go back, get more. Robinson come up, give it. Samuel said “Cooper coming Mr Robinson go back alonga Darwin, tellem Cooper.” Samuel went back Darwin with Mr Robinson. Cooper come up. Everybody quiet. Quiet altogether. Altogether finished. Plenty horse come up. Cooper told by Samuel country men quiet.”*⁴⁴

Samuel, Jerry explained, walked up from the dinghy calling out towards the bush to identify himself. The Mandiimbula who heard him came to meet him, hitting themselves as a sign of past grief as they thought he, and the others who went away with him, had been lost forever. Samuel handed them presents. Robinson then joined Samuel,

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

distributing more presents as Samuel advised the Tiwi that Joe Cooper was returning to the island. Later, when Cooper and the shooters' horses did arrive, the Tiwi were no longer aggressive. There were bands which were not as peaceful as others and Cooper was careful to remain on his guard all of the years he was in the islands.

The steamer *Wai Hoi* (*Waihoi*) made several trips to Melville Island, transporting twenty horses to Cape Gambier, or as the Tiwi elders described, "It (the steamer) bring up plenty horses. Too many for us to get through."⁴⁵ When the *Wai Hoi* arrived at Yulupoo, Cape Gambier, two of its passengers were Harry Cooper and Samuel Ingeruintamirri. Following Samuel's visit with Robinson, the Tiwi were more settled and they immediately helped Harry Cooper unload the horses. The second trip by the *Wai Hoi* also saw a small group of Darwin residents take the opportunity for a quick visit to the island. They were impressed by the friendliness and the appearance of the Tiwi they met on the beach. Furthermore, while the *Northern Territory Times* of 30 June 1905 reported Aborigines around Darwin to be suffering from the effects of opium and alcohol, the same could not be said of the Islanders. On the second trip the steamer brought all but one of the Tiwi back from the mainland. The remaining man had died at Oenpelli. Five of the Tiwi women had married Iwaidja or Gagudju (Kakadu) men which helped to establish tolerable relationships between the buffalo shooters and the Mandiimbula and Yeimpi people. The Tiwi had waited patiently for the *Wai Hoi* to return with their relations. In the words of a Tiwi elder, "...they watch steamer come up. Dinghy come. (They) went down along water. Cry. Meet'em brothers, cousins, sisters." It was now the turn of three more island men to be exposed to the wider world, when with John Ngaringari, they travelled over to Darwin soon after their relations had been returned to Melville Island.

In Tiwi oral history, Cooper returned to Melville Island in a cutter after the *Wai Hoi* had sailed there.⁴⁶ Included in the new team were eighteen Iwaidja people, mainly shooters.⁴⁷ These were responsible for some cultural changes among the Tiwi. Through the Iwaidja the Islanders learnt of the concept of magic and deaths by poison, but, although they came to believe in these practices, their actual use was beyond the understanding of the Tiwi. The Islanders' earlier interaction with the Larrakia and the Woolna had all been hostile, prohibiting any understanding of their culture to an appreciable extent. Now, through Cooper's workers they saw and heard the didgeridoo (didjeridu) although it was not incorporated into the life of the Islanders. While some Tiwi hold the message stick (*pori-ngitti* or *purinjiti* or *tungini*) to be indigenous to their islands, elders say it was introduced by the Iwaidja.⁴⁸ If the Tiwi adopted the idea of the message stick from the mainlanders it was quickly absorbed into their culture as it soon featured in the transmission of communications about feuds and mortuary rites. Two important features in the diffusion of culture between these two groups were the adoption of some Iwaidja words, or the Islander version of these words, into the Tiwi language and the widespread use of dugout canoes, instead of a restricted one. Mainland ritual was observed by the Tiwi, but was not practised by the Tiwi. A Iwaidja mortuary ritual, the Mumor, was witnessed in the Tiwi Islands in the 1960s, didgeridoos (didjeridu) being included in this ceremony. However, several Iwaidja and Maung (Goulburn Island) people were among the participants in this ceremony, along with a small number of Mandiimbula, and it seems to have been instigated by a man of Iwaidja-Tiwi descent.

On the whole, however, traditional Tiwi culture remained virtually intact. While there were a few additions to it in the form of new psychic beliefs, adopted words and possibly

message sticks, the only noticeable material change was the replacement of bark canoes with dugouts. Cultural items collected by D. M. Sayers and Baldwin Spencer during Cooper's stay in the islands included Iwaidja as well as Tiwi material. Forming part of the ethnographical collections in the South Australian Museum and the Museum of Victoria respectively, these items, including didgeridoos (didjeridus) are now, unfortunately, listed all as being of Tiwi origin.

The limited transmission of culture spread as the Islander population increased around Cooper's camps and a number of the Islanders began working for Cooper in exchange for food and other items. Several also worked on his luggers, the *Buffalo*, the *Ethel* and a third vessel which the Tiwi named as the *Mura-tarna*. Over time, a few of the Tiwi took on the names of Europeans working on Melville Island and became known as Cooper, Old Cooper, Johnson and Sam Green, demonstrating some form of affiliation with these buffalo shooters and timber getters. Some friction did occur, however. Frightened by the horses, Tipuranginamirri, a Yeimpi band man, in the words of Tiwi elder Jerry Kerinauia, speared a "big mob" of these, while others he "cutt'em (with a) tomahawk". As the buffalo camps gradually moved across Melville Island, they encroached on the territory of other bands who now encountered the buffalo shooters more frequently. By September, 1906, anthropologist Hermann Klaatsch, reported that a large camp of Tiwi people was established in the shooters' camp in a valley about ten miles from the Jessie River in north-eastern Melville Island.⁴⁹ The Iwaidja occupied a separate camp to the Tiwi but friendly relationship was maintained between the two groups.

This idyllic picture was not true in other regions of the Tiwi Islands and access to women was a real problem. Docker contends that "the Iwaidja ran riot ... abducting hugh numbers of lubras...", while Stanley merely comments that "...later fighting broke out because Cooper's workers took other men's wives and several men were killed."⁵⁰ This action, though exaggerated, is at the nub of complaints against Cooper and the Iwaidja by a number of Tiwi. A Mandiimbula man, Paddy Minidji Cooper, alleged that

Joe Cooper stole his mother from Snake Bay when she was a little girl. A native (Iwaidja) first shot her father dead. She was taken to (the) mainland and given to Nowaringu. Later she returned to Snake Bay with Nowaringu. The man shot was Tuorrajua.

The cause of this violence was the virtual lack of mainland women in the Iwaidja camp. Father John Cosgrove recorded that

Cardo (Kerinauia, a Mandiimbula) says Cooper gave mainland blacks rifle to "gammon shoot" buffalo. They went straight to "bush-myall" (Tiwi) camp and either shot men or threatened them and took women. Cardo says they shot the men.⁵¹

**TIWI WOMEN TAKEN FROM THEIR BANDS BY
IWAIDJA BUFFALO SHOOTERS**

NAME	COMMENTS
Ampangirileu	Also called Porangotearto
Carmel Pukwui	Became consort to Dick Marapadji (Iwaidja man); purchased by Bishop Gsell, December 1916
Collounpulla or Tipungkunatimo	Taken to Cape Gambier (could be the same as Tipunkwunatimo)
Kaluanimo	Father, Runguainni. Taken by Nowaringu (Iwaidja man)
Mary Turramura	Taken from Bathurst Island
Mungarpilitimo	Became consort to Mungaru (Iwaidja man)
Names unknown	Two daughters of Turimpi Munkara
Napiakillimo	Mother, Tipartuungkalua
Peringitimo	Daughter of Murikambunga and Bongdadu
Piartomori	Became consort to Tumitawae, a
Mandiimbula at Paru	
Pipuaramilia	Footwalked from Cape Fourcroy, Bathurst Island, when the Iwaidja ordered the Tikalauila to bring them women
Tarpilarpui	Became consort to Dick Marapadji (Iwaidja man)
Tipaeakurntanu	Full sister of Napiakillimo
Tiparlabiu	Taken to Cape Gambier
Tipartruakulua the Iwaidja	A wife of Turimpi Munkara when handed to
Tiperarpitimo	Taken from Malau and around Bathurst Island in a small cutter by the Iwaidja. Joe Cooper was in the cutter
Tipermun(i?)	Handed over to the Iwaidja with Tipartruakulua, Turimpi's daughters and Pipuaramilia
Tipuminiua	Taken to Cape Gambier
Tipunkwunatimo	Brought from Cape Fourcroy

Wompungalui	Daughter of Turimpi Munkara and Pongariwintumo; taken to Cape Gambier. Was this one of the two unnamed daughters of Turimpi listed above?
Celina	Consort to Bert (Gagudju man)
Alipitjimo	From Mandiupi
Name Unknown	From Mandiupi. Grandmother to Klateemoona (male)
Name Unknown	From Mandiupi. Consort to Fejo
Catherine Tiperangkatanni	From Turupi. Her first husband was shot by the Iwaidja
Tipuntauranu (Munkara?)	Consort to John Ngarngari (Iwaidja man). Possibly a daughter of Turimpi Munkara
Pillow Uringkamulattamo	From Impinari. Consort to Old Albert Wundjitta (Iwaidja man)
Rosie Mangarumpatu (Mungarumparu)	Consort to John Ngarngari (Iwaidja man)
Tipayakurntanu	Daughter of Turimpi. Taken to Paru. Was possibly one of the unnamed daughters of Turimpi listed above
Bridget	Consort to Peter (Iwaidja man)

Fig. 10 Sources: Interviews with Matthias Ulungura, Paru, 30/5/1964 and 4/7/1964, Topsy Piantiringilla, Paru, 3/6/1964, Paw Paw Puruntatameri and Malaccajani (Malacca Jack), Nguuu, 13/6/1964, Jerry Kerinauia, Nguuu, 17/8/1964, Aloysius Puantulura, Nguuu, 5/12/1964, Albert Croker and Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 17/6/1965, Enraeld and Piparo Munkara, and Dick Miringmautimirri, Nguuu, 18/6/1965 and Albert Croker, Paru, 1965.

The Iwaidja evidently no longer feared the Tiwi as long as they, the mainlanders, were armed with rifles. The islanders feared these firearms which they called “turawali” or “yungantooni”.⁵² For the first time this violence entered the interior of the islands. Cardo’s inference about Cooper’s involvement in the shootings must, however, be questioned, as an enquiry in 1915 made clear. The enquiry made no suggestion of charges being laid against Cooper. There was a feeling among many Tiwi that since Cooper was the “boss” of the buffalo shooting operation he must be responsible for any perceived wrongs committed by the Iwaidja.⁵³

By 1910 Cooper had established a permanent base at Paru on Melville Island, and half a mile (0.8 km.) across Apsley Strait from Bathurst Island. The following year he went south on leave, leaving L. Benison, the sole European, in charge of the shooting camp.⁵⁴ In that year, shortly before the establishment of the Catholic mission at Nguuu, Bathurst Island, two Iwaidja brothers Ngarngari and Naringor went from Melville Island

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

to Urangu (Wurankuwu), Bathurst Island, seeking a Tiwi woman named Tipurarwuta. They were guided by three Mandiimbula men and a fourth from Bathurst Island. At the Uranguwila (Wurankuwila) camp they were attacked, beaten and speared by the local Tiwi who seized their rifles. The Iwaidja and their guides escaped separately to Paru. The rifles were retrieved but not before two old women and another man were shot on Bathurst Island and four Tiwi women were taken to Paru by Iwaidja raiders.⁵⁵ The *Northern Territory Times* of 19 May 1911, credited Benison with recovering the rifles, but the Tiwi claim that Islander and Iwaidja men retrieved them. Earlier, on 21 April 1911, the newspaper had reported that the injured Iwaidja was taken back to Darwin on Cooper's lugger⁵⁶

Allegations made against the Iwaidja in 1914 included the statement that when Father Francis Gsell was looking for a site for a mission station on Bathurst Island, Iwaidja men armed with rifles were trying to take two women from that island to Paru.⁵⁷ Gsell's version of this incident, written many years after he was told of it, is not supported by other reliable sources or Tiwi oral material. The Iwaidja, wrote Gsell, were repelled by rifle fire from the Bathurst Island Tiwi, whereupon they retreated to Paru and commenced a bombardment of Bathurst Island. The arrival of a boat carrying the Chief Protector of Aborigines, Dr. Basedow, supposedly led to the disarming of the Iwaidja.⁵⁸ Basedow does not mention this incident in his paper on his patrol, nor was it mentioned in a later enquiry into the violence between the mainlanders and the Tiwi. Gsell's error can be attributed to his age at the time of writing his memoirs.

Tiwi history was taking on a new course of some magnitude. Pilling argues that the Mandiimbula and Impinari bands persuaded the Iwaidja to support them in sneak attacks upon other bands, and that the Mandiimbula borrowed guns for use in their raids.⁵⁹ A similar view is held by Poignant with her comment that the Mandiimbula dominated (the Islands) with the assistance of their Iwaidja allies and Cooper's guns.⁶⁰ Hart, Pilling and Goodale pursue the line that,

It was the young Tiwi men hanging around Cooper's camp who suggested to the Yuwatja (Iwaidja) that they go and capture, by force of arms, Tiwi females who had recently become widows. The young men were thus performing their customary roles of agents in widow remarriage - but in this case for foreign clients.⁶¹

It is clear that individual Tiwi men did align themselves with the Iwaidja. What is not clear is how wide this alignment went. Whatever the level of unity, island politics were changing as members of Tiwi bands or totemic groups aided an outside force, the Iwaidja, against other Islanders. Survivors of the Cooper period in the early 1960s, say there was no alliance between the Iwaidja and the *majority* of any bands.⁶² For instance, they recalled how the Mandiimbula launched spear attacks upon the Iwaidja in fights over women. What is clear is that several Tiwi died as a result of Iwaidja raids. Stamped in the Islanders' memory one man, Tuarutjuua, threw spears at a group of mainlanders because they had an Island woman, Tiperangkatanni, in their camp near Snake Bay, Melville Island. Shot and wounded, he ran into an area of jungle and hid. He was burnt to death there when Tiwi hunters set fire to his hiding area without knowing he was in there. Another man, Lakatui, shot on Bathurst Island, fell into a river and was drowned. Lakatui's sister Klarka-tu said, "You have shot my brother. Shoot me too." Klarka-tu's body arched over as she was shot. Brother and sister were buried in the one hole.

Tiwi oral history records that some people fled into swampland to hide when they were shot at. Others resorted to terrible measures as the incident indicates: "In their flight from the invaders (Iwaidja), a man and his father buried the latter's ancient blind mother, Tupurualaua, to prevent her from falling into the enemy's hand. "Pitirikidjika impanga (they buried her alive)".⁶³ Tiwi oral history records the names of Tiwi women taken by the Iwaidja.⁶⁴ At least one of the women, Carmel Pukwiu, escaped from the Iwaidja at Cooper's Poomparoonga camp in Mandiupi. Carmel, then a young girl, made good her flight with the assistance of an old woman, despite a shot being fired at her. At Paru she stole a canoe and paddled to the new mission. Apparently blaming Cooper for the taking of the women, Carmel said, "Cooper humbug. Him want too many wives". The word "humbug" is used by the Tiwi to describe a very bad person. The result was that the Iwaidja began taking some Tiwi wives by force and they became the putative fathers of children who are now considered Tiwi.

Another incident which occurred in 1907, added to the Cooper and Tiwi legends. According to a number of writers, both academic and popular, and even the Cooper family itself in very recent times, Harry Cooper met his death at the hands of the Tiwi.⁶⁵ Perhaps they felt that an adventurous life deserved a more adventurous death than that which did occur. In fact, Copper died of disease in his bed in the shooters' camp on Melville Island on the 10 April, 1907.⁶⁶ Islander elders agreed and were most emphatic that Harry had died of natural causes, not from a spear wound. Oral history indicated that the popular version of Harry's death was not correct, just as it showed the implausibility of the widely held belief about the alleged duel fought by Joe Cooper. The fictitious version of Harry Cooper's death must have developed a relatively short time after his death as Father William Henschke, who arrived at Nguiu in 1915, believed that he had been speared.⁶⁷

By 1911, circumstances changed dramatically for both the Tiwi and Joe Cooper. With a heavy decline in the number of buffaloes, Cooper had turned to cutting and milling cypress pine on the island, initially without a licence, introducing new equipment and machinery to the Islanders.⁶⁸ A Catholic mission was established at Nguiu on Bathurst Island directly opposite Paru in June, 1911. Another big change was in the area of Aboriginal Affairs. On 1 January 1911, under the Northern Territory Act of 1910, the Territory passed from South Australian to Commonwealth control. Under South Australian administration, the Protector of Aborigines had been a medical doctor until 1905, when that position was transferred to the police. During that time there had been no real involvement in Aboriginal matters, as the Protectors had no special statutory power.⁶⁹

With the transfer of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth in 1911 more interest was taken in the indigenous population, including the Tiwi. The Aboriginal Act (1910), passed in South Australia, was adopted as Territory law in 1911. Cooper, like all other employers of indigenous labour in the Territory, had to license his Iwaidja and Tiwi workers.⁷⁰ Three medical protectors were appointed to the Aboriginal Department, one of these, Doctor Herbert Basedow, being the Chief Protector. In addition, a Chief Inspector and two Inspectors of Aborigines were also recruited to the new agency.⁷¹ Also, in 1911, Walter Baldwin Spencer was appointed Special Commissioner to look at Aboriginal matters in the Northern Territory. In 1912 he replaced Basedow as Chief Protector, remaining in the position during that year.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Spencer and John Gilruth, later Administrator of Northern Territory, joined a number of official and unofficial guests who took advantage of Cooper's presence to visit the Tiwi Islands. These included Searcy, Klaatsch, who studied the Tiwi between 17 September and 1 October 1906, and D. M. Sayers, who collected a large number of Tiwi and Iwaidja artefacts during his stay. Baldwin Spencer spent time in the islands in 1911 and 1912, accumulating a large amount of ethnographical material on the Tiwi and also the Iwaidja.⁷²

PROTECTORS AND CHIEF PROTECTORS OF ABORIGINES, NORTHERN TERRITORY 1869 - 1919

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ADMINISTRATION

1869	apparently no Protector at Fort Point camp.
1870 - 1874	Dr. J. S. Millner
1874	Dr. Samuel Ellison
1875 -	Dr. F.G. Guy
1876 - 1884	Dr. Robert Morice
1885 - 1889	Dr. Percy Moore-Wood
1889 - 1898	Dr. Leonard O'Flaherty
1898 - 1904	Dr. Frederick Goldsmith
1902	Dr. T.E.F. Seabrook (acting)
1904 - 1907	Dr. Thomas Kensington Fulton
1907 - 1908	Dr. Cecil Strangman
1908 - 1911	W.G. Stretton

COMMONWEALTH ADMINISTRATION

1911	Dr. Herbert Basedow
1912	Walter Baldwin Spencer (also Special Commissioner on Aborigines)
1913	W.G. Stretton
1914	position abolished
1914 - 1919	H.E. Carey, Government Secretary, carried out duties of Chief Protector.

Fig. 11 Source: Austin, T., 1992; Kettle, E., 1990; Reid, G., 1990; Powell, A., 1988; Northern Territory Administration Reports, 1911 - 1917

It is interesting to note that in 1912, as Chief Protector, Spencer took a quantity of trade goods to the islands to purchase local artefacts. This supplying of goods to the Tiwi coincides with a comment by Jerry Kerinauia that various officials of the Northern Territory Administration came to Paru at different times with presents for the Islanders, such as blankets, food and mirrors.⁷³ An article in the *Daily Telegraph* on the 25 July, 1914, headed "A Vanishing Race. Professor Spencer on the Aborigines", stated that Spencer had visited the Tiwi Islands in 1912 and "obtained cinematograph and phonograph records of the 'weird, wild burial and mourning ceremonies' of the natives". While the Cooper legend claims that Cooper pacified the Tiwi and made the islands safe for visits by Europeans and for the establishment of the Catholic mission at Nguui, Spencer writes of his first visit to Melville Island

*...of course we carried revolvers and a rifle or two. The natives are apparently quite friendly but even Cooper never moves away from camp without being armed.*⁷⁴

Spencer also commented that Cooper "takes good care to have his bodyguard of Port Essington boys with him when he hunts."⁷⁵ Spencer's writings support the statement by Iwaidja elder John Ngarangari that Spencer was always armed with one or two revolvers and a shotgun or rifle.⁷⁶ The evidence of Cooper obviously still wary of an attack by the Tiwi is different to the romantic picture of his pursuing errant Islanders clad in a naga (loincloth) and armed only with a spear.⁷⁷ Tiwi elders deny such pursuits ever occurred. The Tiwi were still feared in the early part of this century and this is demonstrated by L. C. E. Gee, a government geologist, who sailed around and landed on the Tiwi Islands in July and August, 1905, while Robinson's team were recommencing their shooting operations. Gee examined several canoes, other artifacts and camps he came upon, but as he wrote,

*Beyond the fleeting glimpse of one near Garden Point we have not seen a native yet on these islands; but we know that they are numerous, and feel convinced that all our movements are watched by them. They are regarded, universally, as simple savages - so low in the scale that they have not evolved or acquired the use of the wommera (sic) to hurl their spears, as on the mainland, but throw them still by hand. They are full of the primitive man's instinct to kill and destroy We are well-armed and keep a sharp look-out all the time, and give them no chances; but for a careless man, or the man who has lofty scorn for possible danger from such a source - for these, it is a dangerous place indeed.*⁷⁸

Three years after the establishment of the mission at Nguui, however, C. P. Conigrave led a peaceful expedition across Bathurst Island.⁷⁹ Basedow, too, made peaceful contact with the Tiwi during his patrol around the islands in 1911.⁸⁰ Gee, incidentally, does not mention Cooper or Robinson in his writings, commenting only that "...on the east side (of Melville Island) the buffalo has been hunted and a large number of hides exported."⁸¹ Even Father Gsell was given a revolver to carry when he set out to establish the mission at Nguui, but after a day he stopped doing this, saying that he preferred the power of prayer.⁸²

The issuing of timber-cutting licences to other parties led to the arrival of more Europeans on Melville Island. Spencer appointed Cooper as Honorary Sub-Protector for the Tiwi Islands. While no date is given for this appointment, and Briggs suggests

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

1911, it must have been in 1912, after Spencer took up his duties as Chief Protector.⁸³ Part of Cooper's duties was to supervise "incurable" Aborigines sent to Melville Island from Darwin, the Tiwi giving the name *Wona-rui* to these mainland Aborigines. By 1912 a few of these "anti-social" people were also exiled to the Nguui mission.⁸⁴ The Tiwi, who had not experienced the plight of the people in Darwin, now encountered a new type of Aborigine, one with serious social problems, for

*...in cases where the native is found the worse for drink, or suffering from the effects of opium smoking, he is sent to Melville Island and placed under the care of an officer there; this temporary banishment is having a most desirable effect. There are three females and three males undergoing banishment; it is the most humane treatment for cases of this nature, as sending them to gaol for a week or two has not the slightest effect.*⁸⁵

At this time, there were suggestions that Robinson's leases should be revoked and Melville Island gazetted as an Aboriginal reserve.⁸⁶ In 1911, Police Inspector Nicholas Waters again raised with External Affairs the idea of making Melville Island a reserve or station for "half-castes" and "native prisoners".⁸⁷ As late as 1921, when he was the Acting Chief Protector of Aborigines, Waters continued to argue that as Melville Island was not stocked as required by the terms of its leases, it could be resumed and become a healthy and self-supporting reserve and jail for indigenous people.⁸⁸

In 1913, in contrast with most Aboriginal groups on the mainland, the populations of the Tiwi Islands, like other islands, included numerous children. The Administration related this to the fact that "Chinese are not present on these islands" where they could solicit indigenous women as some, deprived of European or Asiatic female company, did on the mainland.⁸⁹ Although sexually healthy, the Tiwi were now exposed to two other problems, alcohol and disease. Members of the Tiwi community had travelled to Darwin immediately after Cooper returned to Melville Island in 1905. Gradually others made the voyage to see the town and to seek work. Paddy Porkilari, for instance, was taken as a boy to Darwin by Cooper. There, he worked for British-Australian Telegraph Company (BAT), delivering letters (telegrams?) around Darwin. Jerry Kerinaia and others worked on Cooper's lugger *Buffalo* or one of his several other boats, not only around the island, but also travelling to Darwin and to such places as Daly River. The Tiwi built up a reputation as good workers and were in demand. One of the ill-effects of this exposure to the outside world was the consumption of alcohol by some of Tiwi which led to social problems and perhaps jail.⁹⁰ Tiwi Islanders were included in anthropometric measurements of Northern Territory Aborigines taken by Dr. Roy Burston in 1912 or 1913. Burston measured all indigenous prisoners in Fannie Bay jail, Darwin, though he does not make it clear whether some or all of the Tiwi used in his study were imprisoned at the time.⁹¹

A more serious result of the Tiwi moving within European society and with mainland Aborigines was the introduction of various types of diseases. As early as 1911 people were being sent from Melville Island to Darwin for treatment for Ulcerative Granuloma, a sexual disease.⁹² Epidemics of subterian malarial fever, causing "considerable mortality", also occurred from time to time, including one in August, 1912. This was followed by an outbreak of measles in December. The Islanders' mobility made treatment of these illnesses difficult.⁹³ Fortunately, no cases of malaria were observed; however a high level of mortality occurred on Melville Island in the first months of 1913,

due to an outbreak of influenza. During a visit to the island by Dr. H. K. Fry in February he found that the epidemic was practically at an end.⁹⁴ None of the reports clarify how many of the diseased and sick people were Tiwi and how many were Iwaidja or other mainlanders.

A patrol to the islands by Mounted Constable John R. Johns in February, 1915, caused concern in government when Johns reported the presence of venereal diseases among the people in the Tiwi Islands. Such diseases had been found in the past by Dr. Fry in 1913 and by Dr. Mervyn Holmes, the Chief Health Officer, in 1914. The diseases, while prevalent, were confined at the time to Melville Island, indicating that they had probably been introduced by non-Islanders.⁹⁵ *The Northern Territory Times* stated on 7 January, 1915, that a small number of Aborigines from Melville Island were suffering from granuloma and "several other brands of weird diseases". In 1915, too, Holmes and Dr. Breinl reported that "a curious type of ulceration of the foot exists among the natives of Melville Island, which resembles in some way..." a type of ulceration found in New Guinea.⁹⁶ This sounds like a form of leprosy but as Cook pointed out,

*It is noteworthy that the Melville Islanders, who are a fierce and bellicose tribe, have always been free from leprosy. As recently as 1914, a special survey of these people was made and no leprosy could be detected.*⁹⁷

The situation was to change in later years as contact with the outside world brought this disease to the islands also. Cooper was praised for his attention to those suffering from these illnesses.⁹⁸ His kindness to, and interest in, the island's indigenous people was even officially noted.⁹⁹ He is also remembered by the Tiwi for participating in Island ritual and custom. When his daughter Josephine died at Paru on 21 September 1914, in his absence, he "cried native style" at her grave upon his return. He then organised for a Tiwi mortuary ritual for her, impressing the participants with his generosity. Although Cooper was a teetotaler, according to Jerry Kerinaiaua, "him bringa winga (grog) too. No more bottle. Big cask."¹⁰⁰ While Cooper had some involvement with Tiwi ceremonies he did not, as several authors suggest, gain access to secret rituals and customs simply because the Tiwi culture is unique in Indigenous Australia in having no secret ceremonies or practices.¹⁰¹

Through visits by police officers and inspectors of the Aboriginal Department, and the compulsory movement of errant mainland Aborigines to Paru and Nguiu, a number of the Tiwi were now gaining a basic acquaintance with the Australian system of law, order and officialdom. In 1915 they witnessed a further aspect of this system in action. Cooper was the only person for whom the Iwaidja or Tiwi would work on the island. Occasionally, other mainland Aborigines came to the island to seek work with Cooper, who had timbergetting and milling operations at various localities away from Paru. These localities and the sites of operations of other operators became part of Tiwi oral history. The other operators, such as Sam Green and Charlie Williams, had to request indigenous labour from Cooper.¹⁰² Early in October, 1914, Green and R. Webb complained to the Chief Protector of Aborigines, H. E. Carey, of alleged cruelty by Cooper to several of the "exiles", of shootings by the Iwaidja, and of some Tiwi who had contracted a sexual disease. Green then sent his complaints to Attlee Hunt, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, in Melbourne.¹⁰³ Cooper had the written support of Spencer and Gilruth but even so, he resigned his Honorary Sub-Protectorship in March, 1915, to allow a clear path for any official action, and also because Robinson

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

had sold the Melville Island leases to Melville Island Limited, a Vestey's company, in that year. Vestey's had been interested in Melville island in 1903.¹⁰⁴ Cooper's office was transferred to a French missionary at Nguuu, Father Regis Courbeaux (Courbon).¹⁰⁵ Cooper also took steps to ensure that the firearms used by the Iwaidja were secured when not required for legitimate use.

**GOVERNMENT RESIDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS OF THE
NORTHERN TERRITORY 1869 - 1918**

(A) SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ADMINISTRATION

YEAR	OFFICER-IN-CHARGE, FORT POINT
1869	G.W. Goyder

YEAR	GOVERNMENT RESIDENTS
1870	Dr. John Stokes Millner (acting)
1870 - 1873	Captain Bloomfield Douglas
1873	Dr. John Stokes Millner (acting)
1873 - 1876	G. Byng Scott
1876 -1883	E.W. Price
1883 - 1884	G.R. McMinn (acting)
1884 - 1890	Hon. J. Langdon Parsons
1890	J.G. Knight (acting)
1890 - 1892	J. G. Knight
1892 - 1905	C. J. Dashwood
1905 - 1910	C.E. Herbert
1910	Nicholas Holtze (acting)
1910	S.J. Mitchell

(B) COMMONWEALTH ADMINISTRATION

YEAR	ADMINISTRATORS
1911 - 1912	S.J. Mitchell (acting)
1912 - 1919	Dr. J.A. Gilruth

Fig. 12 Sources: *Annual Reports of Northern Territory Government Residents and Administrators to 1919*; Lockwood, Douglas, 1968, p. 276; Kerr, Margaret Goyder, 1971, p. 179

The investigation ordered by the government passed into Tiwi history. While W. G. Stretton, S.M., conducted a thorough enquiry into the allegations of Green and some made by Gsell, Dr. Holmes, assisted by Chief Inspector Beckett, carried out a medical examination of 176 Tiwi and Iwaidja people. Only 20 of these were found to be suffering from sexual and other serious diseases.¹⁰⁶ Stretton, whose findings were broadly supported by Holmes, found that conflict and shootings had occurred, but that this “lawlessness”, principally caused by the Iwaidja, had occurred in Cooper’s absence. Among other findings Stretton considered that the “incorrigibles” were properly fed by Cooper. A large portion of the evidence presented to him would not be admitted in a court of law but was found useful.¹⁰⁷ The police and legal counsel agreed that convictions would not be obtained on the evidence.¹⁰⁸ Coincidentally with the enquiry the Northern Territory administration suggested the possible need for a protectorate station on Melville Island.¹⁰⁹

The circumstances of one killing remained strongly in the minds of Tiwi and Iwaidja elders. Ted Cooper, the son of Alice Cooper and Joe’s stepson, shot a Tiwi man, Pipiarmireeyung, for allegedly paying attention to Ted’s Tiwi wife, Kudjaliamo. Pipiarmireeyung was shot while squatting next to Jerry Kerinauia playing marbles. In Tiwi history Judge Bevan held court at Robinson Creek, Melville Island, and Ted was almost hanged.¹¹⁰ It is possible that Bevan was the legal counsel who gave his opinion on the evidence given to Stretton. There may have been talk of Ted facing execution but he later died of disease in Darwin hospital in October, 1915.¹¹¹

The main impact of the enquiry was the decision that all mainland Aborigines employed by Cooper and the other Europeans on Melville Island should be deported. Before this could happen, several incidents occurred. In 1915, Cooper narrowly escaped being killed when a Tiwi man attacked him with a tomahawk over the stealing of women by the Iwaidja.¹¹² A Tiwi man was shot by an Iwaidja, in what proved to be an accident.¹¹³ Then, at the beginning of the Wet Season, in late 1915, as Tiwi oral history so vividly recounts, Cooper’s vessel, the *Mura-tarna* sank off south-eastern Melville Island, with the loss of its cargo.¹¹⁴ Some time earlier, the Tiwi had introduced a song about another of Cooper’s vessels, the *Buffalo*, into their ritual when it sank with a cargo of logs off Imalu, near Garden Point.¹¹⁵

On 21 December, 1915, Gilruth reported “...all mainland boys removed from Melville Island. No Melville Island women allowed accompany them.” Gsell noted that there were some women left behind and that they had returned to their “tribes”. He further observed that Cooper was in no danger as he had a bodyguard of young Tiwi men who had been brought up in his camps.¹¹⁶ Pilling states that “...before long most of them (the Iwaidja) gave up their Tiwi wives.”¹¹⁷ In reality some Tiwi women did accompany their Iwaidja partners. As Goodale recounts, “About sixty people, including some Tiwi women and half-Tiwi children, departed for the mainland in seventeen canoes”.¹¹⁸ The departure of the women is given credence by Gsell, who wrote that the island women originally stolen by the Iwaidja were given a choice of accompanying their consorts to the mainland or returning to their own people. Some, who had children by the Iwaidja, preferred to go with their partners. Others chose to return to their Tiwi husbands.¹¹⁹ Tiwi oral history lists not only the women who went to the mainland, and their off-spring, but also offer a better picture of the Iwaidja departure, pointing out that while some left eastern Melville Island and Snake Bay by canoe, others travelled in Cooper’s vessel, the *Ethel*. All went to Port Essington.

The Tiwi: From isolation to Cultural Change

Early in 1916, not 1914 as some authors say, Tiwi at Paru and Nguiu watched the departure of Cooper and his family in the *Ethel*. According to Jerry Kerinauia they sailed to Port Essington before travelling to Darwin.¹²⁰ Cooper left the islands discouraged and disillusioned. The majority of the buffalo had been shot out, two of his vessels had been lost, together with their cargoes, other timber-getters had been licensed to operate on the island, Green had proved to be a bitter enemy, the government had forced him to repatriate his Iwaidja workers to the mainland, and a Tiwi had made an attempt on his life. On top of this, the transfer of the island leases to Melville Island Limited meant that the economic future of the island was in doubt. This was not the end of his association with the Tiwi, however, as a number joined him in trepanning off Melville Island or in milling and buffalo shooting operations conducted by Reuben Cooper and his father in the Cobourg Peninsula - Malay Bay area.¹²¹ By late 1916, however, Cooper was on the Adelaide River, while Reuben was hunting with "his staff of trained natives" on the Mary River.¹²²

What did the Cooper era on Melville Island mean to the Tiwi? In an historic sense the Islanders were introduced to a new type of European, the buffalo shooter, as well as timber-getters. With these men came horses and new machinery. It did not, however, mean a loss of land or resources to the Tiwi. Their knowledge of mainland Aborigines was widened through the arrival of the Iwaidja, the "incorrigibles", and other mainlanders. They were also introduced to a new style of confrontation and to diseases and illnesses. In these years too, through the usual misinformation and exaggeration, the myth of the Tiwi was even further extended.

Cooper, for his part, opened the way for other Europeans came to Melville Island, though it is doubtful whether he was actually instrumental in stopping attacks upon outsiders, as is often claimed. Europeans were still wary of landing unarmed on the islands even while Cooper was resident. Cooper introduced the concept of employment for food to some Tiwi, and he opened the mainland world, beyond the Larrakia - Woolna coastal region, and outside employment for the Tiwi. To some, this meant the beginning of alcohol abuse and the associated problems. The Cooper period also meant an introduction to Australian law, with imprisonment for some. He did not interfere in the spiritual life of the Islanders but, through some participation, encouraged it. Through introducing the concept of a European-Australian environment on their doorstep and a European form of lifestyle to the Islanders, he must have had some small part in the Tiwi accepting the Catholic mission when it was set up at Nguiu in 1911.

The Iwaidja brought violence to the islands and a low level of cultural change. Their presence meant some, if temporary, political change to the Tiwi social structure, and an innovation on the part of members of one or two bands to bring a new concept, outsiders armed with rifles, into local feuds. This impact was geographically wide and even some Tiwi households in remote areas of the islands suffered at the hands of the Iwaidja through demand for women or through shootings. Cooper's employment of mainlanders also meant the establishment of strong and lasting social relationships between the Iwaidja and the Mandiimbula and Yeimpi bands. Furthermore, the actions of the Iwaidja led to blood relationships between the two tribal groupings, expanding those already forged through the stealing of Larrakia and Woolna women by the Tiwi and the theft of Tiwi women by the Larrakia. While both Cooper and the Iwaidja played their roles in changing the history and cosmos of the Islanders, they did this in different ways. Cooper had the biggest impact socially and economically on the Tiwi, exposing them to some of the realities of the outside world.

For the first time, the Tiwi had become aware that they had to share their islands permanently with outsiders from whose force and control they could not escape. While there had been some small additions to their culture, they had seen the voluntary departure of some of their members to join another tribe. Their natural tendency to defend their shores was beginning to decline. Permanent political and social change and a low degree of acculturation were already accepted as Father Francis Xavier Gsell commenced his work at Nguiu.

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- ¹ South Australian State Records (hereafter SSSR) No. 790, document no 52.
 - ² Meston, *op. cit.*, p. unknown. Whatever the population in 1882, it grew from a small number of buffalo introduced to the island from the Indonesian Archipelago between 1826 and 1828.
 - ³ See, for instance, Reid, Gordon, *A Picnic with the Natives*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990, pp. 98, 174; Powell, *op. cit.*, pp. 104, 129, 164-165; Beatty, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31; Docker, *op. cit.*, 1964, p. 240; Hill, Ernestine, *The Great Australian Loneliness*, Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens, 1945, p. 228; Harney, W.E., *North of 23°*, Sydney: Australasian Publishing Company, n.d. (c. 1950), pp. 193-194.
 - ⁴ Beatty, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
 - ⁵ Discussion with men of the Mandiimbula band, Paru, 22/6/1964 and 24/6/1964. Discussion with Jerry Kerinauia, Nguiu, 17/8/1964.
 - ⁶ *The Argus*, 24/8/1911, p. 6; *The Age*, 12/1/1911, p. 7.
 - ⁷ Sunter, G.H., "His Majesty of Melville Island". In *The Argus*, 12/1/1935, p. unknown. Sunter G.H., *Adventures of a Trepang Hunter*, London: Hurst and Blackett, 1937, pp. 133-137.
 - ⁸ National Archives (Hereafter NA), NT007080/1914 - 75/4, Spencer to Hunt, 19/11/1914, p. 3. Interviewed at Paru, 17/6/1965, Jerry Kerinauia and Albert Croker, an Iwaidja descendent, provided Alice's indigenous name.
 - ⁹ NA, NT003220/1915-1935/14 of 4/6/1915, Gilruth to Minister for External Affairs, p. 3.
 - ¹⁰ Briggs, A., "Cooper, Robert Joel (Joe, Jokupa)". In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell (eds.), *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 1, to 1945*, Darwin: Northern Territory University Press, 1990, p. 61. Bauer, F. and J., "Cooper, Robert Joel (Joe)". In B. Nairn and G. Searle (eds.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 8, 1891-1939*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981, p. 107.
 - ¹¹ *South Australian Register*, 27/5/1897, p. 5; *The Age*, 12/1/1911, p. 7.
 - ¹² See, for instance, Anon, "Buffalo hunter became king of Melville Island", in *Daily Mirror*, 2/10/1978.
 - ¹³ Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 61; Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 240. Briggs' entry on Cooper lists several references that contain erroneous details.
 - ¹⁴ Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 61. *South Australian Register*, 27/5/1897, p. 5, shows that Robinson himself was on the island with Cooper and Flynn for some time.
 - ¹⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 10/5/1895. Hart (1930), *op. cit.*, p. 170, refers to the term *Wunjuk*.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ¹⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 7/6/1895.
- ¹⁷ Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 123; Anon, "Wealth on the Hoof". In *Parade*, (January, 1959), p. 43; Hill (1991), *op. cit.*, pp. 374-375; *South Australian Register*, 27/5/1897, p. 6. Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 2, Conigrave, C.P., *North Australia*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1936, p. 152, and Barrett, Charles, *Coast of Adventure*, Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens, 1941, p. 181, give the wrong locality.
- ¹⁸ Interviews with John Ngarinari and Matthias Ulungura, Paru, 22/6/1964, and Jerry Kerinaia, Nguui, 17/8/1964.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Bismark Kerinaia, Nguui, 24/3/1964.
- ²⁰ See, for instance, Hill, *op. cit.*, pp. 374 - 375. Hill's "Mala-ola" is, in fact, the Malauila, a Tiwi band.
- ²¹ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, pp. 234 -235.
- ²² Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 319.
- ²³ Interview with Jerry Kerinaia and Paddy Porkilari, Paru, 3/6/1965.
- ²⁴ Searcy (1909), *op. cit.*, p. 237.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 235.
- ²⁶ Interview with Paw Paw Puruntatameri and Malaccajanni (Malacca Jack) Tipiluntiamia, Nguui, 13/2/1964.
- ²⁷ Interview with Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Jerry Kerinaia, Argau Portaminni and Tipperary Tipiloura, Nguui, 20/9/1964.
- ²⁸ Searcy (1909), *op.cit.*, p. 237; *South Australian Register*, 27/5/1897.
- ²⁹ Interview with Illatumi, Bismark Kerinaia, Jerry Kerinaia, Albert Croker and Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Paru, 23/9/1964. The names of those who were shot were recounted during this discussion.
- ³⁰ Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 187.
- ³¹ Interview with Jerry Kerinaia, Nguui, 1/6/1965. Uroongee and U-renchi may be the same person, and, if so, Flynn, not Cooper, was the culprit.
- ³² Interview with Paddy Porkilari, Paru, 16/2/1965.
- ³³ Pilling (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 312; Jarratt, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
- ³⁴ *Northern Territory Times*, 22/11/1895.
- ³⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 29/11/1895 and 3/1/1896.
- ³⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 13/11/1896 and 30/6/1905.
- ³⁷ Interview with Jerry Kerinaia, Nguui, 1/6/1965.
- ³⁸ Interviews with Illatumi, Paru, 24/3/1964, Albert Croker and Cardo Kerinaia, Paru, 24/3/1964, John Ngarinari, Paru, 22/6/1964, Jerry Kerinaia, Paru, 17/8/1964, Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Jerry Kerinaia, Argau Portaminni and Tipperary Tipiloura, Nguui, 20/9/1964, and Jerry Kerinaia, Nguui, 1/6/1965, provided a list of names of the Tiwi who travelled to the mainland with Cooper. According to some of my informants the lugger picked up these people after Cooper had departed from Melville Island.

- ³⁹ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 657; Interview with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 17/8/1964. Jerry said, Cooper “understand altogether lingo.”
- ⁴⁰ Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
- ⁴¹ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245, Melville Island Inquiry by W. G. Stretton, 28/5/1915, attachment.
- ⁴² SASR, GRS1. Title 300/1897. *Northern Territory Times*, 13/4/1900. *South Australian Government Gazette*, No. 37, 9/9/1897, indicates that Robinson held the Melville Island leases then. *South Australian Government Gazette*, No. 42, 28/9/1899, shows that the leases were then held by O’Connor. SASR, GRS10/16901/1907.
- ⁴³ *Northern Territory Times*, 30/6/1905.
- ⁴⁴ Interview with Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Jerry Kerinaiaua, Argau (Angau) Portaminni and Tipperary Tipiloura, Nguiu, 20/9/1964.
- ⁴⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, 30/6/1905. Interview with Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Jerry Kerinaiaua, Angau (Argau) Portaminni and Tipperary Tipiloura, Nguiu, 20/9/1964.
- ⁴⁶ Interviews with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 25/8/1964, and with Illatumi, Bismark Kerinaiaua, Jerry Kerinaiaua, Albert Croker and Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Paru, 23/9/1964.
- ⁴⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 30/6/1905, states that “30 or thereabouts Aborigines” were travelling to Melville Island, including “two or three” Tiwi who had been brought to the mainland in 1896. Bauer, F. & J., *op. cit.*, p. 107, give the figure for the Iwaidja as twenty. NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - 15/3220, W.G. Stretton, Melville Island Inquiry, 28/5/1915 - Cooper stated in evidence that he brought 18 Aborigines from the mainland, including two women, in 1905.
- ⁴⁸ Interviews with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 25/8/1964, and John Baptist Pupangamirri and Barry Puruntatameri, Nguiu, 7/11/1995. Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 196.
- ⁴⁹ Klaatsch, *op. cit.*, p. 589.
- ⁵⁰ Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 213; Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- ⁵¹ Catholic Mission Genealogical Records, Nguiu - Cardo Kerinaiaua’s card, *op. cit.*
- ⁵² Interview with Albert Croker and Cardo Kerinaiaua, Paru, 23/6/1964. Harney (1947), *op. cit.*, p. 32, spells the name for these rifles as “Tarawalle”. Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 47-49, refers to the Iwaidja as “Taroolas”, a variation of “Turawali”.
- ⁵³ Jarratt, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
- ⁵⁴ *The Age*, 12/1/1911, p. 7; *South Australian Register*, 5/5/1911; *Northern Territory Times*, 26/5/1911.
- ⁵⁵ Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, pp. 333-336; interviews with John Ngarangari, Paru, 1962, and Paw Paw Puruntatameri and Isadore Fernando, Nguiu, 1/2/1964.
- ⁵⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 21/4/1911.
- ⁵⁷ NA Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245, Statements made to the Department of External Affairs by Samuel Green 10/11/1914.
- ⁵⁸ Gsell (1956) *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49.
- ⁵⁹ Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 192.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ⁶⁰ Roslyn Poignant, *op. cit.*, p. 40, note 16.
- ⁶¹ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 109.
- ⁶² The following information is drawn from interviews with Illatumi, Bismark Kerinauia, Jerry Kerinauia, Albert Croker, John Ngarinngari and Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Paru, 23/9/1964, Cardo Kerinauia, Paru, 26/3/1964, Paw Paw Puruntatameri, Isadore Fernando, Nguuiu, 1/2/1964; Dominica Johnson, Nguuiu, 8/11/1995.
- ⁶³ Worms, *op. cit.*, p. 168.
- ⁶⁴ Interviews with Enraeld Munkara, Piparo Munkara, Dick Mirringmautimirri, Nguuiu, 18/6/1965; Paw Paw Puruntatameri and Malaccajanni (Malacca Jack) Tipiluntiana, Nguuiu, 13/2/1964; Albert Croker and Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 17/6/1965; and Carmel Pukwiu Puruntatameri, Nguuiu, 19/6/1964.
- ⁶⁵ Reid, *op. cit.*, p.98; Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 104; Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 170; Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Blaikie, G., "The Trials of King Joe". In *The Sunday Mail Color*, 15/10/1978, p. 16; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 26; Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 10; Anon, "White King Joe's Trial by Combat", *op. cit.*, p. 14; Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 42; Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 240; Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 133; Barrett (1941), *op. cit.*, p. 181; Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 657. Cooper, J. & K., *History of the Cooper family - William Cooper 1800-1865*, Claire: published by the compilers, 1972, p. 13, state that Harry "was killed by natives in Darwin in 1907.
- ⁶⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, 16/4/1907 and 26/4/1907. While the newspaper report, 16/4/1907, states that the examining doctor certified the cause of death as heart failure, the Register of Deaths, Entry 132, lists the cause of death as syphilis, a disease that can result in heart attack. Harry's tombstone in the Palmerston Cemetery, Darwin, erroneously gives the death as occurring on the 16/4/1907. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 62, states "...Harry had died of (possibly) dengue fever in 1907."
- ⁶⁷ Interview with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 2/9/1964
- ⁶⁸ *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory for 1908*, p. 16; SASR GRS10/17465/1907, July, 1908.
- ⁶⁹ *Northern Territory of Australia. Report on Operations Since the Transfer to the Commonwealth*, Melbourne: Department of External Affairs, March, 1913, p. 9.
- ⁷⁰ *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 70, 16/9/1911, pp. 1898-1899.
- ⁷¹ *Report of the Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1911*, p. 5.
- ⁷² Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, pp. 641-713, 910-914. Spencer, W.B., "An Introduction to the Study of Certain Native Tribes of the Northern Territory", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, No. 2, April 1912, pp. 5, 13-18, 29-31, 34-35, 47-50, 55-56, 58. Spencer, W. B., "Summary of Report of Preliminary Scientific Expedition to the Northern Territory", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, No. 1, March 1912, pp. 3-14. In 1912 Spencer injured himself with a barbed Tiwi spear, resulting in his being laid up for some weeks - *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 3/4/1912, p. 10.
- ⁷³ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 653. Interview with Jerry Kerinauia, Nguuiu, 25/8/1964.
- ⁷⁴ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 643.
- ⁷⁵ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 658. According to Father William Henschke (interview Darwin, 29/10/1964), when sailing around to his various camps on Melville Island to collect hides Cooper never went ashore without a .303 rifle.

- ⁷⁶ Interview with John Ngarinari, Paru, 22/6/1964.
- ⁷⁷ Beatty (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 30; Beatty (1947), *op. cit.*; Sunter (1937), *op. cit.*, pp. 134 - 135.
- ⁷⁸ Gee, *op. cit.*, p. 28. Gee continues his scathing attack upon the Tiwi in "Notes on a Cruise Round Melville and Bathurst Islands". In *Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Report, 1907*, Vol xi, pp. 539-547.
- ⁷⁹ Conigrave, C.P., "Across Bathurst Island". In Roderick, Colin (ed.), *Wanderers in Australia*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1949, pp. 145-158; Conigrave (1936), *op. cit.*, pp. 151-200.
- ⁸⁰ Basedow, *op. cit.*, pp. 305-306.
- ⁸¹ Gee (1907), *op. cit.*, p. 547.
- ⁸² Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 96.
- ⁸³ Spencer (1928) *op. cit.*, p. 720; NA Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245 - NT 007080/1914, Spencer to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 19/11/1914, attachment p. 1. Neither of these sources states the date of appointment. Briggs, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- ⁸⁴ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 126; Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 190.
- ⁸⁵ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p. 36. NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT14/Samuel Green, 10/11/1914, and Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245 - W. G. Stretton, Melville Island Inquiry, 28/5/1915, refer to the "prisoners" in Cooper's camp.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 35; NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - Sub-Inspector N. Waters to Government Resident, 31/5/1910, recommended that both Bathurst and Melville Islands be declared reserves.
- ⁸⁷ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year Ended 30 June, 1921*, p. 18.
- ⁸⁸ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year Ended 30 June, 1922*, pp. 9, 14.
- ⁸⁹ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p. 49. W.B. Spencer Collection, Museum of Victoria, Box 14, Folder 1, J.T. Beckett to Chief Protector of Aboriginals, 23/12/1912, reports on "the evil influence of the Chinese" on the mainland.
- ⁹⁰ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p. 36.
- ⁹¹ Burston, Roy, "Records of the Anthropometric Measurements of One Hundred and Two Australian Aboriginals". In *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, No. 7, 1913, pp. 2-3 plus Tables 1 to 12 - see p. 3.
- ⁹² Breinl, Anton, "Report on Health and Disease in the Northern Territory". In *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, No. 1, March, 1912, pp. 32-53 - see pp. 40 and 51.
- ⁹³ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1912*, pp. 53, 62 and 63;. Holmes, Mervyn J., "Report of the Medical Officer of Health for the Year Ending 31st December, 1912", *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, No. 6, 1913, pp. 1-21 - see pp. 1 and 13.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ⁹⁴ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p. 46 and 48.
- ⁹⁵ NA CSR13/16, NT1915/1637, Venereal Diseases amongst Natives - Melville and Bathurst Islands. NT.
- ⁹⁶ Breini, A. & Holmes, M.J., "Medical Report on the Data Collected During a Journey Through Some Districts of the Northern Territory". In *Bulletin of the Northern Territory*, No. 15, 1915, pp. 1-4, plus photographs - see pp. 1-2.
- ⁹⁷ Cook (1927), *op. cit.*, p. 30.
- ⁹⁸ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Holmes to Administrator, 27/5/1915, pp. 3-4.
- ⁹⁹ NA Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245 -NT007080, Spencer to Hunt (Secretary, Department of External Affairs), 19/11/1914, attachment, p. 1.
- ¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 29/10/1964; Jerry Kerinauia, Nguiu, 17/7/1964; and Albert Kulappaku Croker and Jerry Kerinauia, Paru, 17/6/1965.
- ¹⁰¹ Beatty, *op. cit.*, p. 29, Conigrave (1949), *op. cit.*, p. 145.
- ¹⁰² NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT007080/1914, Spencer to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 19/11/1914, attachment p. 1.
- ¹⁰³ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245, NT006824/1914, Hunt to Green, 6/11/1914, and Sam Green's statement of allegations, 10/11/1914.
- ¹⁰⁴ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Gilruth to Minister for External Affairs, 4/6/1915, pp. 2-3. SASR GRS 1/252/1903.
- ¹⁰⁵ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Gilruth to Minister for External affairs, 4/6/1915,p. 3.
- ¹⁰⁶ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Holmes to the Administrator, 27/5/1915, p. 1.
- ¹⁰⁷ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 -W.G. Stretton, "Melville Island Inquiry", 28/6/1915, pp. 1-7.
- ¹⁰⁸ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT003220/1915, Inspector Waters to Government Secretary, 2/6/1915, and NT 004827, Government Secretary to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 18/9/1915.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers* (Hereafter *CPP*). 1911. Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1914 - 1915, p. 25.
- ¹¹⁰ Interview with Illatumi, Bismark Kerinauia, Jerry Kerinauia, John Ngaringari, Albert Croker and Don Tipiamutta Hocking, Paru, 23/9/1964. No official material has been located on this matter.
- ¹¹¹ NA Series A3/1 Item NT16/245 - NT005364/1915, unsigned telegram to Secretary External Affairs, 4/11/1915. Presumably this was sent by the Government Secretary as Gilruth. the Administrator, was sick at Paru that day - ref. telegram from Gilruth to External Affairs, 4/11/1915.
- ¹¹² Interview with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 29/10/1964.
- ¹¹³ NA Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245 - Green to Minister for External Affairs, 28/8/1915, and Gilruth to Secretary, External Affairs, 9/9/1915.

- ¹¹⁴ Interviews with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 17/8/1964 and 25/8/1964 and with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 2/9/1964. Henschke was at Nguiu when Reuben Cooper, a teenager, who was in charge of the vessel, arrived there after the vessel sank. See also Sunter (1937), *op. cit.*, p. 144.
- ¹¹⁵ Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 27-28; Harney, *op. cit.*, p. 93; Interview with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 17/8/1964.
- ¹¹⁶ NA Series A3/1 Item NT 16/245 - NT005954/1915, Gilruth to Secretary, External Affairs, 21/12/1915, and NT000245/1916, Gilruth to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 30/12/1915.
- ¹¹⁷ Pilling (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 3.
- ¹¹⁸ Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ¹¹⁹ Gsell (undated manuscript), *op. cit.*, p. 96.
- ¹²⁰ Interviews with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 2/9/1964, and Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 17/8/1964.
- ¹²¹ Interviews with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 17/8/1964, Nancy and Albert Croker, Paru, 4/6/1964, and Albert Croker, Paru, 20/5/1963; Catholic Mission Genealogy Records, Nguiu - Clement Kerinaiaua's card. Poignant, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 -41, refers to the Tiwi on the mainland, including photographs of some of these.
- ¹²² *Northern Territory Times*, 3/8/1916 and 16/11/1916.

CHAPTER SIX

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

(1911 - 1918)

The new century brought dramatic and lasting changes to the Tiwi cosmos. The Tiwi had had intermittent, and occasionally prolonged, contact with outside forces: Asian, European, indigenous Australian and, arguably, Melanesian. Each incident of contact offered the Tiwi a fleeting glimpse of a foreign culture and developed a desire for a small range of artifacts they had not previously produced or could not manufacture themselves. Through regular contact with Indonesian trepangers the Yolgnu, the Aborigines of Arnhem Land, were able to absorb many aspects of the visitors' culture into their own lifestyle. A similar experience occurred among the Cape York groups who enjoyed a long history of trade with the Torres Strait Islanders, and, through them, the Papuans. In comparison, the Tiwi refused to establish an intense relationship with a foreign people. Their traditional culture therefore underwent little change until the end of the nineteenth century when their attitudes changed. The well earned reputation the bands on Melville Island had as a result of their aggressive attitude to many of their visitors no doubt assisted in the retention of their customary lifestyle.

The early years of the twentieth century had introduced three forces which deeply influenced the Tiwi. The first of these agents, the buffalo shooter Joe Cooper, established the way for a permanent outside presence in the islands during his time on Melville Island. The second influence, the mainland Iwaidja employed on Melville Island by Cooper for ten years, introduced new cultural practices to the Islanders. Father Francis Xavier Gsell, the central representative of the third force, the Catholic Mission, had a lasting, if gradual, effect upon the lives of virtually all members of the Tiwi community. Gsell did not bring violence and aggression to the Tiwi as the Iwaidja did but he was a representative of Australian law and culture.

Since the first days of permanent settlement in the Northern Territory, Aborigines were viewed as less than human by most authorities. W.J. Sowden, who accompanied a South Australian parliamentary delegation to the Top End in 1882, described Aborigines in Palmerston (Darwin) as "...such degraded specimens of humanity! - less manlike some of them than a grinning and chattering monkey..."¹ Pastoralist Alfred Giles argued that people in the south "should be made aware that the blackfellow is not the noble savage he is depicted, that if he lacks one thing more than another it is virtue."² Such a view was supported by none other than Baldwin Spencer's partner in ethnographical research, F.J. Gillen. Appearing before a South Australian Select Committee on Aborigines in 1899, Gillen commented that "...the Australian aborigines are the lowest

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

in the scale of barbarian races, as well as the lowest in human intelligence.” Anthropologists of this period were obsessed with ranking human cultures and attempting to judge and assess across a range of cultural mores.

This contempt was exaggerated by guilt feelings arising from acts of genocide which occurred in the course of “pacifying” the Aborigines. Even W.G. Stretton, who was to become a magistrate and Chief Protector of Aborigines, informed J.G. Knight, the Government Resident, in 1890 that the time was fast approaching when “Australia will be benefited” by the extinction of the Aborigines.³ At the same time, Knight realised that “entry into their (the Aborigines’) country is an act of invasion...they will halt at no opportunity of attacking the white invaders.”⁴ Aware of these attitudes towards indigenous people, it is not surprising that J.L. Parsons, then Government Resident, saw a need for the establishment of Aboriginal reserves, or some other solution, by which to isolate the indigenous people of the Northern Territory from the spreading pastoral frontier. Consequently, in 1887, he expressed concern that Aborigines in the inland of the Territory could not be encouraged to re-establish themselves on Melville Island which was not then occupied by Europeans.⁵ The movement, if it had been pursued, would have removed inland Aborigines from cattle country, freeing up water supplies for the use of the cattle only, and avoiding the fear of stock being speared and of conflict between pastoralists and the Aborigines. Whether the Aborigines were actually approached about this proposal or whether Parsons realised that they would not voluntarily leave their own lands to which they were attached by traditional tenure and by customary religion, is difficult to say. At that time, 1887, inland Aborigines had little if any knowledge of the Tiwi and their islands. In 1899, Parsons suggested the moving of mainland Aborigines in the Northern Territory to Bathurst Island, where they could form a commonwealth of their own.⁶ No thought was given as to how the Tiwi would have re-acted if such a migration had proceeded.

Efforts to assist Aborigines in practical ways were not successful. In fact, under South Australian administration, the lot of the Aborigines in the Northern Territory was not a happy one. The Protectors of Aborigines, who were also Medical Officers, received little official support for many years. The establishment of reserves on the mainland did not have the full support of officials for some years. This was eventually to change in 1911 when a conference of government, Church and scientific representatives, held in Melbourne, recommended that the Commonwealth create new reserves in the Territory. The cessation of missionary efforts on the Northern Territory mainland by the Jesuits in 1899, was also of consequence after struggles against anti-social, cultural and environmental influences. A former missionary in Papua, the French-born Father Gsell became Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Victoria and Palmerston (later the Diocese of Darwin) in 1906.⁷ On 1 September 1908, he wrote to Cardinal Moran, that “the establishment of a mission among the aborigines is also keeping my attention”.⁸ Since arriving in Darwin Gsell had been thinking about the possibility of a central mission with outlying branches as a means to protect the Aboriginal people. Gsell was well aware of the difficulties faced by the Jesuits on their stations at Rapid Creek, near Darwin, and around the Daly River. These included the closeness of European facilities, as well as climatic and economic problems.

The social decline of many Aborigines in the “settled areas” and the problems faced by the Jesuits were borne in mind by Gsell as he travelled through the Northern Territory and the East Kimberley in 1909. Searching for a site for a mission station on reserved

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

land he came to realise that his efforts would be more successful on an island and with an indigenous group which had not been contaminated by the socially unacceptable elements of the wider society. Accordingly, in 1909 he considered the possibility of establishing a mission among the Tiwi, looking initially at Melville Island, while at the same time seeking the gazettal of Bathurst Island as a reserve. Bathurst Island was chosen because the Aborigines were not subjected to all the problems which come with living near European communities.⁹

On 3 May 1909, Gsell wrote to the Government Resident, C.E. Herbert,

Having contemplated for some time passed (sic), the ways of establishing a Roman Catholic mission among the aborigines of this Northern Territory, I came to the conclusion, that to make it a success it must be carried on a suitable ground, not too far away from civilized country and yet sufficiently protected against unwholesome interference. Several areas have been declared "native reserves" by the Government on the mainland; but to my mind none of these "reserves" would answer the purpose so well as the two islands of "Bathurst" and "Melville" would do. I think that these two Islands would make an ideal spot for mission work among the natives.

I hear that "Bathurst Island" is still free from lease, but that "Melville Island" is kept under 42 years lease by Mr. Robinson. I would like to ask the Government how a Mission Station could be established on those Islands, under the present conditions. Re "Bathurst Island" would it be advisable to have it declared "native reserve", and re "Melville Island" would a temporary lease interfere with an establishment of a mission station for the benefit of the natives settled on that Island.

I submit these considerations to your Excellency, trusting you will kindly pay them a favorable attention.¹⁰

Father Gsell was correct in stating that Bathurst Island was then unalienated. Leases on the island had been sold in 1897 but not taken up.¹¹ Interest was shown by other potential buyers, and the leases were unsuccessfully offered for sale at different times. A brief interest had also been sparked when, on 26 August 1904, the *Northern Territory Times* reported the alleged finding of gold on the island by a crew member of the lugger *Ethel*.¹² The report proved to be incorrect.

Acknowledging that complications could possibly arise if a mission station was allowed to be established on Melville Island without the approval of the lessee, E.O. Robinson, the government decided to delay any action on Gsell's request.¹³ Cooper, too, demonstrated his objection to a mission station on Melville Island when Gsell wrote to him in 1909, telling him of his plans. The buffalo shooter made it clear that the island was not suitable for a mission station and that his business could do without mission activities.¹⁴ Undaunted, Gsell turned to Bathurst Island. As early as 1888 the Jesuits had come to realise that for a mission to succeed it had be established on an island, that is in isolation. However, their application to work on either of the main Tiwi Islands had been refused. Nevertheless, Gsell again wrote to the Government Resident on 25 July 1910,

As it is acknowledged by every fairminded man, one of the most urgent needsof this Northern Territory is a provision of some sort for the moral and social betterment of the aboriginal race; and every earnest effort in this way is entitled

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

to the hearty support of all. Being at the head of the Roman Catholic Community in this part it is my Duty (sic) to see that my people do their utmost to help their less fortunate brethren out of their degraded state. In their name and with their assistance, as well as with the assistance all generous and broadminded people, I intend to open an institution for the benefit of the aborigines.

This Institution would be in the shape of an industrial and agricultural school, where the natives would receive, together with a moderate literary (sic) and religious training, all the attainments that would make them useful members of society.

In order to make of this institution a success, a rather large and suitable land is required. But as several attempts of this kind have failed on the mainland, a large and fertile island might give greater chance of success. The only islands near by that would suit this purpose are Melville and Bathurst Island (sic). Unfortunately Melville Island has been disposed of already. But Bathurst Island is still, or almost free, and could easily be turned into a Native Reserve where this Institution for the betterment of the natives could be carried on.

In consequence, may I ask the Government respectfully, to declare Bathurst Island a native Reserve, for the exclusive use and benefit of the aborigines and to grant me the license and faculties to carry on my intended Institution on this Island. In case the Government could not grant the whole of my request, I would be satisfied for the moment, if half of the Island, or any smaller portion the Government should think fit, be granted for the purpose.

This is the request which I submit most respectfully to your Honour for Government approval, trusting that, through your favourable report you will obtain us the sanctions and the support of the Government for this noble work.¹⁵

Gsell was realistic. He acknowledged that missionaries frequently suffered a bad reputation and that mission Aborigines were seen to be lazy, be thieves and liars.¹⁶ There were, however, other reasons for opposition to mission operations by some non-Aboriginal people, especially by a number of pastoralists throughout Australia. As early as 1832 some colonists in New South Wales complained about public money being used to establish a mission which they saw as being a useless undertaking. Stock-keepers consistently argued against missions being established on good arable land able to be used by pastoralists while others with a financial interest in selling Aborigines alcohol or tobacco, or desiring access to women, also fought any establishment of a mission. Explorer Edward John Eyre, writing of the mainstream attitude towards the indigenous community, made mention of public references “to the total failure of all missionary efforts...”¹⁷ In 1890, Hermannsburg mission in Central Australia became the centre of an official enquiry as the result of its complaints about alleged immorality on surrounding cattle stations and the massacres of Aborigines at the hands of the mounted police. Pastoralists, in turn, accused the missionaries of inflicting corporal punishment on mission Aborigines. As Reid commented, “Tension between the mission and the settlers soon developed. The pastoralists criticized the usefulness of the Hermannsburg station and the provisions of government rations.”¹⁸ The missionaries denied the charges made against them, and the enquiry found little to support the allegations on either side. It recommended the continuation of the Government subsidy to the mission for several more years.¹⁹

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Among the critics of mission efforts were professed Christians such as Michael Durack in the East Kimberley, who, in the early years of the twentieth century was “like most pastoralists...sceptical of missionary activities...”²⁰ The anti-mission attitude was to continue into the middle of the present century. The pastoralists, like many other non-Aboriginal people in remote areas, saw missions as a welfare centres, with the inmates being fed and clothed in return for a little meaningless work. They also described Aborigines as shiftless, dirty and lazy, conditions which, in the eyes of outback Europeans, were perpetuated by mission policies. Many pastoralists felt that the land occupied by mission stations could be better used as grazing land for their stock, while the Aborigines could be put to work as cheap labour on the cattle and sheep stations to help the industry's economy. Little thought was given to the primitive living conditions and the racism encountered on many stations even in the early 1970s.

In all probability, Gsell was not aware of a plan by Nicholas Waters, Sub-Inspector of Police who proposed, in May 1910, that the Tiwi Islands be declared Aboriginal reserves where Northern Territory “half-castes and natives” could be detained and trained in agriculture or as servants.²¹ Any approval for such action would have to be granted under South Australian legislation, as no law aimed specifically at Territory Aborigines was in place until the Northern Territory Aborigines Act was assented to on 7 December 1910. During the debate on this bill Northern Territory representative Thomas Crush stated that “Refractory (Aboriginal) characters would be sent to a reserve on one of the islands off the coast (of the Territory).”²² Because of the remoteness of the islands off the northern coast of the Northern Territory, and their closeness to the traditional tribes of the Arnhem Land which could lead to violence, it is very doubtful whether Crush was referring to Minjilang and the other islands further to the east. It is far more likely that he had in mind one of the Tiwi Islands. Waters' proposal had the support of the new Government Resident, S.J. Mitchell, who expressed regret that Bathurst Island had been thrown open for leasing under the Northern Territory Tropical Products Act 1904. In 1887 J.L. Parsons had raised the need to encourage migration of mainland people to the Tiwi Islands but such a comment failed to recognise cultural diversity. Waters' suggestion also did not take into consideration the effects of outside cultures on the lifestyle and customs of the Islanders. Although Waters' proposal was not taken up, years later, in 1940, a station for “incorrigible” people from the mainland was established at Garden Point, on Melville Island which, with the smaller islands in the Tiwi group, was declared a reserve on 19/2/1941.²³ By this time, the Tiwi were more complacent and were, to a degree, more acceptable of other indigenous groups. By the 1960s, they were described in the annual reports of the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration to be a most contented people.

Gsell was not put off by what he saw as Government indecision. At his request, Archbishop O'Reilly of Adelaide took up the matter with W.J Denny, the relevant Minister. As a consequence further sales of leases on Bathurst Island were stopped immediately²⁴ The priest followed this up with a personal visit to Denny's office on 23 September 1910.²⁵ In the interim, the Minister had taken initial action to have most of Bathurst Island proclaimed as an Aboriginal reserve.²⁶ The remaining 50,000 acres (20235 hectares) for which lease contracts had been signed were yet to be taken up by the would-be planters.²⁷ Citing the practice in British New Guinea (Papua) where Crown grants were made for religious purposes, Gsell sought about 10,000 acres (4047 hectares) on the proposed reserve for his mission station.²⁸ The first part of Gsell's

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

battle was won when, on 29 September 1910, permission was granted for the proposed mission to occupy the south-east corner of Bathurst Island, the area approved being “10,000 acres or thereabouts”.²⁹

After months of frustration and endeavour Father Gsell had achieved an accord with the South Australian government to bring aspects of mainstream culture and values in the form of European style education and industry, as well as Christianity, to the Tiwi. The battle was not yet over, however. The missionary was keen to see the whole of Bathurst Island dedicated as a reserve for the Tiwi. To rescind the successful agricultural lease applications appeared to be a difficult task. Gsell had willing and influential supporters in the forms of John Gilruth and Baldwin Spencer.³⁰ Following the transfer of the Northern Territory to Commonwealth control on 1 January 1911, Gilruth was appointed the first Administrator, while Spencer became Special Commissioner and Chief Protector of Aborigines.

This support is not surprising in light of the unsatisfactory condition of many Aborigines in the settled areas of the Northern Territory, with reported cases of ill-treatment, prostitution, opium smoking, excessive drinking and syphilis.³¹ Fringe-dwelling groups around Darwin and Alice Springs lived in squalor and depression, while all efforts to improve the circumstances of children of Aboriginal-European or Aboriginal-Asiatic descent had failed. Apart from the surviving missions, the reserves set up before 1911 were not developed in any way. It was not to be unexpected, then, that justifiable criticism of South Australia’s administration of Native Affairs in the Territory was voiced by politicians and officials of the time, as it has been in more recent times by some scholars.³² The Department of External Affairs, for instance, reported that under South Australian control indigenous Territorians were “practically uncared for”, those living near European settlements being “for the most part demoralised”.³³

Eventually, on 9 September 1912, Gilruth was able to advise the Department of External Affairs that the four successful applications for the agricultural leases had been withdrawn.³⁴ The whole of Bathurst Island was declared a reserve on 18 January 1913, apparently as the result of some officially correct manipulation by the Department and the Territory Administration.³⁵ The efforts of Gsell, Spencer and the government had ensured that the mission be able to carry out its work without interference from non-indigenes involved in plantation work on the island. It was hoped that this would enable much of the Tiwi customs and culture to be preserved into the future.

Gsell did not sight the Tiwi Islands until April, 1911, when he sailed to Joe Cooper’s camp at Paru, Melville Island, with a Chinese boat owner, H. Lee.³⁶ In reporting Father Gsell’s trip, *The Northern Territory Times* commented that

*Bathurst Island is a virgin field for missionary enterprise, and its isolated inhabitants being practically uncontaminated by contact with civilisation, this missionary enterprise has a fair chance of showing what can be done in the direction of gradually transforming the pure savage into an intelligent member of the human family.*³⁷

The newspaper report is not only couched in ethnocentric terms but hints at the concept of low level institutional racism, that is, there is a need for people of one culture, perceived to be inferior and inhuman, to be subjected to the beliefs and lifestyle of another people who are deemed to be superior in intelligence and, moreover, human in nature. This would come through institutionalisation, a policy supported by all Australian

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

governments. There are two redeeming features in the report; any transformation should be gradual, not rushed; and change for the Tiwi would be achieved through learning, not enforcement. Gsell's approach was, in fact, one of gradualism, vastly different from that of the earlier Moravian missionaries in Victoria who saw a need to destroy indigenous culture and language in the name of assimilation.

After exploring for a distance along Apsley Strait between the two main islands, Gsell chose Nguuiu, or Ngooyoo, as he spelt it, half a mile (.8 km.) across the strait from Paru.³⁸ Gsell later argued that a mission established in the territory of one tribe could be claimed by that tribe, resulting in difficulties in trying to work with neighbouring tribes.³⁹ In fact, stations on the mainland, such as Port Keats (Wadeye) and Elcho Island (Galiwinku), attracted people of various tribal allegiances foreign to the site of the particular mission they settled on, resulting, at times, in social upheavals. Further, Father Gsell stated he was fortunate in the choice of Nguuiu as the site in that although it belonged to the "Mandiboolas" (Mandiimbula band), it was rarely visited by that group prior to the mission being formed. Thus, when the station was established there it could comfortably be visited by other Tiwi bands.⁴⁰ Tiwi bands did visit each other's territories at times but even so Gsell made an excellent choice. It is difficult to understand how Gsell would have had sufficient opportunity to study the Tiwi culture in enough depth to make the choice of site because of cultural attitudes. This culture is somewhat different to those of the mainland groups he was more familiar with. This was his first trip to the islands and there is no indication that he had had more than passing communication with Joe Cooper, so unless Cooper, or somebody else at Paru, told Gsell of the political status of Nguuiu, his choice of the site was, as he said, just a fortunate one.⁴¹

Back in Darwin the reaction of some residents to Gsell's proposed mission was both negative and erroneous. While some people argued that Bathurst Island was not inhabited, others claimed that it was occupied by "miserable blacks" and the "wildest type of savage" who had recently attacked travellers.⁴² Both of these views were incorrect. In recent years there had been at least four expeditions to Bathurst Island. A government geology survey was conducted in 1905. In the previous year, a party searching for gold saw "a number of natives there very tall and of fine physique". One old man had made overtures of peace with the prospectors.⁴³ Another prospector, Sam Olsen, was more cautious. At his request, the Government Resident approved food and goods to be distributed as a peace offering when Olsen visited Bathurst Island for several months late in 1908.⁴⁴ The Holtze-Playford expedition spent ten days on Bathurst Island in June 1910, using carriers from Melville Island. Bathurst Island was "...believed to have a fairly numerous population of natives, in a purely wild and primitive state, none of whom have ever come into contact with the white man except, perhaps in a casual way..."⁴⁵ The expedition saw no Tiwi, although numerous signs showed the island to be heavily populated.⁴⁶ The Tiwi on Bathurst Island had not been exposed to visitors from the outside world to the extent experienced by their relatives on Melville Island. Nor had they suffered inter-racial conflict as had occurred on the larger Island. Although pearlers and other people who landed on Bathurst Island were wary of the Tiwi there and spears were thrown at visitors on several occasions, this section of the island community appeared to be more involved in conducting inter-band and totem group feuds than in confronting outsiders with threats of violence.

Not to be put off by his critics, Gsell had a clear picture of what his approach to his missionary endeavours should be. The approach could take one of several directions.

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

The first direction related to mission stations which, wrote Harris, were "...places of survival and protection, which provided a gentler introduction to Western society and time for Aboriginal people to make adjustments."⁴⁷ The second direction can be seen in Price's less sympathetic picture of indigenous people being herded into

*comparatively small reservations, where worthy but unscientific Christians struggled to teach them a strange religion, the alphabet, and industries that were often intensely distasteful to the Aborigines as the complete negation of their former nomadic life.*⁴⁸

Gsell's vision for Nguiu was more in line with Harris' ideal than Price's perception of the role of missions. Guided by the Jesuit experience, Gsell set down as his guide the maxim that

*It is a vital principle which must be appreciated by those who would found a mission on a rock that they should never attempt to run after nomadic peoples...It is better to establish a settlement and to arm oneself with patience. Sooner or later they will find their way to one's door.*⁴⁹

Armed with this precept, Father Gsell sailed to Nguiu to begin a new era in his missionary career. Over the years confusion has arisen about several of the actual details. Accompanied by four Filipino volunteers, Gsell travelled in a rented eight ton lugger on 1 June 1911.⁵⁰ The volunteers were Matthew Garr, Pio Serano, and Pedro and Romolo, whose surnames are now not known.⁵¹ Their arrival at Nguiu was an anticlimax with no Tiwi in sight. There were **not** "three stalwart natives armed with .303 rifles" standing on the beach, as one missionary later wrote.⁵² According to Gsell, he later discovered that his lugger was mistaken by some Tiwi as one carrying a police party responding to the assault upon several Iwaidja seeking Island women in Urangku and the stealing of the mainlanders' rifles in about April 1911.⁵³ If this is correct, the Tiwi fled from sight before Gsell neared the beach at Nguiu. Father Gsell is incorrectly credited with returning the stolen rifles to the buffalo-shooters' camp.⁵⁴ Gsell himself makes no such claim, simply stating that on his first visit to Paru, the buffalo shooters had told him something about the incursion into Urangku by the two Iwaidja brothers and that the rifles and ammunition were returned to Paru.⁵⁵ Nguiu, in Mandiupi, is some distance from Urangku, where the assault occurred.

Apart from any contact with Tiwi people at Paru, the first Islanders to meet the missionary party at Nguiu were two physically handicapped men who assisted with the early work on the embryo station.⁵⁶ Called Boolack and Tokoopa by Gsell, they were, in fact, Paula Puruntatameri, from Munupi country, and Ku-pollie Tipiloura, who had been born in Wilurangku country.⁵⁷ The completion of a small prefabricated house, including a makeshift chapel, enabled Father Gsell to celebrate his first Mass on the new mission on 8 June, 1911. Gsell does not expand on this event, but according to other writers, the Tiwi observed the service from cover, taking Gsell to be performing some new type of "corroboree" by himself.⁵⁸ This is an embellishment to the actual happening. In all probability the Filipino men would have attended the Mass, so Gsell would not have been by himself, nor is *Corroboree* a Tiwi word.

Within a month a number of men but no women or children gradually drifted into Nguiu to work for rations. Although *The Northern Territory Times* reported on the good start made at Nguiu, the priest had made no attempt to Christianise the Tiwi.⁵⁹ He stood by his maxim. As for the Filipino workmen, they introduced a number of Spanish names to

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

the Tiwi. Young men now acquired such names as Antonio, Mariano, Santiago and Fernando.

RELIGIOUS STAFF, BATHURST ISLAND MISSION, 1911-1918

NAME	YEAR OF ARRIVAL
Father (later Bishop) Francis Xavier Gsell	1911
Father Regis Courbon	1912
Brother Gerard van der Meijss	1912
Sister Mary Kieran Doyle	1912
Sister Mary Joseph Schaap (or Scaap)	1912
Sister Mary Adrian	1912
Brother Lambert Fehrman	1912 or 1913
Father Cros	1913
Brother Aubrey Kelly	1913
Father William Henschke	1915

Fig. 13 (This list has been compiled from the Archives of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Bishop Gsell's writings and Brother John Pye's *The Tiwi Islands*. There may be errors in the list as presented here. Spencer (1928), p. 904, wrote that his party which sailed to Nguiu on 29 November, 1912, included Sister Adrian who "was going to work at the Mission Station". Confusion exists as to when Brother Fehrman arrived at Nguiu but the year of 1913 given by Pye could be the correct one. It is not known how long some of the missionaries remained on the island.)

Gsell was correct when he said that missions sometimes gained a bad reputation. Missionaries were often disparaged "on the first examples of their word".⁶⁰ Admittedly, some missionaries were futile and harmful and lacked the wisdom and knowledge Aboriginal culture. In a number of instances, all missions can be seen to be incompetent for one reason or another. Thus, Price, for example, is critical of the Spanish missionaries at New Norcia (Nuova Norcia) in Western Australia. He infers that their efforts among the local Juat people led not only to the demise of indigenous culture but also of the people themselves by 1913.⁶¹ Price fails to mention the diseases the Juat suffered from were introduced when European settlement encroached into the country around the mission station. Against these odds the vision of the mission's founder, the valiant and sympathetic Bishop Rosendo Savaldo, was not achieved. Hermannsburg, too, came in for early criticism from local pastoralists. The mission was attacked for other reasons by the Horn Expedition in 1896 with the report that "nowhere on our journey did we see natives so dirty in their habits, so squalid in their mode of life, and so devoid of the usual cheery demeanour as at Hermannsburg."⁶² The missionaries at Hermannsburg had a supporter in F.J. Gillen who, in giving evidence to a South

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

Australian Select Committee on Aborigines in 1899, saw them as “making the natives’ path of extinction easier”, although he did not consider Aborigines could be turned into Christians.⁶³ In 1912 Spencer recommended the Government take control of Hermannsburg, seeing the station as having “...little, if any, use from the point of view of the industrial training or social betterment of the natives” under the missionaries.⁶⁴

The Lutherans have been censured also for their efforts to change long established cultural practises.⁶⁵ Similar attitudes existed on the majority of missions stations established in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with devastating results for the indigenous inhabitants. For instance, the missionaries at Wellington, New South Wales, in the 1830s, “...were repulsed by Aboriginal eating habits and nakedness and by their use of fat as a body lotion”, and seeing the people as “...a revolting and disgusting sight.”⁶⁶ There were missionaries like those at the Presbyterian missions of Kunmunya and Ernabella, admittedly in the minority, who saw nothing wrong in the nakedness of the Aborigines and Islanders or in their culture or many aspects of that culture.

“It must not be inferred”, states Price, “...that the Christian missions to Australian Aborigines were completely deleterious or useless.”⁶⁷ At one station, Beagle Bay, the French Trappists and the German Pallotines studied the local culture, taught the children in the local language, Nyul Nyul, for at least some time, and allowed much of the customary way of life to continue. In 1908 the anthropologist Dr. Hermann Klaatsch said that the Pallotines

*...knew how to lead the aborigines in an easy way to civilization, demonstrating that religion need not interfere with the natural pleasure and enjoyment of the aboriginal race.*⁶⁸

With the benefit of hindsight, Rowley was able to state that “a mission station was part of the disruptive pattern of white settlement...its efforts devoted to a society disintegrating or already in chaos.”⁶⁹ In 1911 the Tiwi on Bathurst Island were not disintegrating socially, nor were they in chaos. They were not in urgent need of help. However, some of the Bathurst Islanders saw Gsell as a protector following the clashes between small Islander groups and Iwaidja men over women prior to his arrival.⁷⁰ These incidents, nevertheless, were only brief spasms in the overall life of the Tiwi hordes involved. The Bathurst Island Tiwi were distinct from their Melville Island relatives and were an interesting people, and, having come into contact with Europeans, on a permanent basis, in only fairly recent years, were virtually free of the diseases suffered by indigenous people in other parts of Australia.⁷¹ Gsell acknowledged that the Tiwi saw themselves as superior to other human beings, including Europeans, and as owing allegiance to nobody.⁷²

From his experience in Papua, Gsell would have been aware that during the struggle for indigenous souls missionaries came into conflict with a traditional spirituality as strongly held as the missionaries’ own Christian beliefs.⁷³ With an attitude similar to those of his confreres at Beagle Bay and some other mainstream missionaries Gsell was tolerant and understanding of nearly all of the Tiwi customs and beliefs. Father Gsell’s approach demonstrated that he did not hold to more popular view that indigenous cultures and lifestyles “were necessarily evil” but still exhibited some commonly held perceptions, arguing that the Tiwi practices and customs were born out of ignorance and tradition.⁷⁴

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Nguiu, or St. Francis Xavier Mission as it was originally called, was established at a time when only two other mission stations, remained in existence in the Northern Territory, Hermannsburg and Roper River. For various reasons an Anglican mission and four Catholic stations had closed, while the Plymouth Brethren home for Aboriginal children ceased to function early in 1912.⁷⁵ If Gsell were to succeed, then, it was not enough for him merely to think, "The heathen are men as we are men, and as such they have the same right that we have to benefits of Christianity."⁷⁶ He had, as he wrote, "...to establish contact with the natives, alone, slowly, prudently; I had to...learn gradually their habits and customs so as to penetrate into their minds without hurt or shock".⁷⁷ He became aware that Tiwi culture, social and political organisations, are very complex and require a lengthy period of study to understand something he was not aware of before his arrival.

Political support for Gsell's endeavour came from Spencer who thought that mission work at Roper River and Bathurst Island should be concentrated on the children. The adults were accustomed to what he termed "a nomadic lifestyle", and were unfit for anything else.⁷⁸ Father Gsell came to see that three things were necessary for him to achieve his goal of "civilising" and Christianising the Tiwi. These were, to introduce training and employment to the adults, to concentrate especially on the children, and to encourage the people to move towards a settled life.⁷⁹ To achieve these aims required a major change to the Islanders' culture. At the same time, Gsell recognised he should not rush in headlong and place a ban on cultural practices. Instead, he was content to wait until the people were ready to show an interest in settling at Nguiu.

In 1897, Gunn, reported on Bathurst Island, stating that

...it will be to the interest of planters to encourage (the Bathurst Islanders) to be useful and the most satisfactory as well as the most humane method of securing that end will be to let them know from the beginning that depredations and outrages will be drastically and efficiently punished.⁸⁰

Gsell's attitude and approach differed from that of Gunn. He saw what to gain the confidence and co-operation of the Tiwi, and to achieve this he, like them, had to practise justice. Like the Tiwi also, he had to practise charity.⁸¹ If he was to understand the Islanders he had to be observant in order to gain a knowledge of their culture and law as Savaldo did and Love was to do. One of his policies was no "handouts". Food and, later, clothing had to be earned. In the words of the late Tiwi elder Paw Paw Puruntatameri, "...I remember that Bishop Zell ee come. Ee make'im quiet, make'im work."⁸² Government Resident S.J. Mitchell proved to be correct when he reported that "from the business-like way in which the work is being undertaken, I have no doubt this mission will be a success."⁸³ In his report for 1911, the Acting Administrator stated that Gsell was "carrying on a vigorous attempt to teach the natives manliness and generally to so educate them as to make them useful people. So far as I can judge this mission is already successfully established."⁸⁴

Soon after work commenced on developing the new station, Mariano Munkara, a member of a powerful family in the Tikalauila band on Bathurst Island, became the principal liaison figure between the missionaries and the Islanders. The missionaries required a willing go-between or spokesman for them, a Tiwi who had some influence among his fellow Islanders. He had to belong to a country close to the station, and

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

young enough to be influenced by the newcomers and not yet so strongly committed to traditional law so as to regress back to customary practices thus failing in his mission instigated role.⁸⁵ In later years, as his influence, prestige and self-importance grew, Mariano became a difficulty rather than a help for the missionaries and other Europeans.⁸⁶

Some communication difficulties would have occurred on the station in those early months. Father Gsell and his Filipino assistants spoke French, Spanish and English, but not Tiwi. By 1911, many, if not all, of the Tiwi would have come into contact with the buffalo shooters. The little pidgin-English the Islanders had acquired from them became the early means of dialogue with the missionaries. After some time Father Gsell was joined by several other members of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. One of these, Father Regis Courbon, a fellow Frenchman, was a clever linguist, somebody who was able to study the Tiwi language. This would be a valuable tool in the missionaries' work. Courbon, who was appointed Honorary Sub-Protector of Aborigines and proved to be popular with the Islanders, was quick to learn the language. In 1912, Spencer found the mission staff hard at work studying the language, as well as the local beliefs and customs.⁸⁷ When Courbon was recalled to France for war service in 1915, this knowledge was apparently lost.⁸⁸

There is some confusion about Father Gsell's ability to converse with the Tiwi in their own language. Bertolini claimed that Gsell was a gifted linguist, and Goodale stated that Gsell became so fluent in Tiwi that he was asked to leave because he knew too much of their business.⁸⁹ Goodale confuses Gsell with Father John McGrath who arrived at Nguiu in 1927, and who became very conversant in the difficult Tiwi language.⁹⁰ Nouyoux reported in 1917 that the mission staff had only a small knowledge of the language, while Docker claims that there was no need for the missionaries to speak "the simple vocabulary" of the Islanders, as conversations between the Tiwi and the staff was conducted in pidgin English.⁹¹ Krastins states that Gsell was able to communicate with the Islanders through "a smattering of pidgin English", while "a later arrival Father Regis (Courbon), mastered a Tiwi dialect and could then converse very easily with one band on Bathurst Island."⁹² There is, in fact, only one traditional Tiwi language and there are no dialects. A greater understanding of the island society would have been gained if a more strenuous effort had been made by staff other than Courbon to learn the vernacular and if this practice was continued after Courbon left the mission. As it was, 12 years were to pass before a study of the language was reconstituted and the workings of Tiwi society began to be understood to an advanced level.

The establishment of buffalo-shooting camps on Melville Island, especially Paru village, possibly made it easier for the Tiwi to accept the construction and presence of the new mission station. The Tiwi did not object to the newcomers clearing land for the station but when a well was dug by Gsell and the Manila-men, the Islanders feared that Ampiji, the Rainbow Serpent of the Tiwi, would be disturbed and attack them. When Gsell and his workers showed no fear of Ampiji and the latter did not appear from the well the reputation of Father Gsell among the Tiwi was ensured. To the Islanders he was the *Angawa-riringani* ("our father" or "priest") or *Tirnima* ("Whiskers").⁹³ He still had to gain the confidence of the Islanders, however, and this would not come until the women and children freely visited the mission he was still slightly suspect. In the meantime, through the provision of food and tobacco, a steady, though casual, work force was established.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

It is not clear when the first of the Tiwi women and children came into the station but they came of their own volition. Gsell offers no indication of when this happened, merely commenting that

But as mutual knowledge and mutual goodwill increased, women and children started to appear and in a short time whole families made it their practice to pay us regular visits, remaining with us sometimes for a few days, sometimes a few weeks. This was a good sign that fear, at last, was not keeping them away anymore.⁹⁴

The first nuns arrived on 20 April, 1912. At first, the Tiwi took the two Sisters to be the wives of the missionaries, having previously been mystified as to why the mission party had no wives.⁹⁵ Although Gsell does not say so, the Tiwi men may have now considered it safe for their families to come to the mission now that there were women in residence.

An important aspect of Father Gsell's policy for the new mission was the introduction of a level of education for the Tiwi children. As he patiently waited for parents to become familiar enough with, and to accept, the missionaries, he responded to a mainland situation in a way which enable the Islanders to gain some basic understanding of what a European form of education involved. Although the Northern Territory Aboriginals Ordinance 1911 included provision for the maintenance of children of mixed descent, there was, said Gsell, no actual government policy for their assistance.⁹⁶ The Administration requested that the missions care for and educate the children. Father Gsell conceived the idea of offering some of these mainland children an undetermined form of higher education to allow them to become teachers of the Territory's Aborigines. It is difficult to state accurately how many part-Aboriginal children arrived to become boarders at Nguiu in those early years. Gsell states that about twelve boys and girls came at the beginning of the program and that these formed the nucleus of the first school in the mission.⁹⁷ According to Pye, seven boys of mixed descent arrived with the first nuns, becoming the initial students in the new school.⁹⁸ The girls may have arrived at a later date. By 1913, thirteen mainland boys and five girls were institutionalised at Nguiu, the overall number of such children still standing at about eighteen in April, 1915.⁹⁹ Father Gsell commented that at the end of their education the children of mixed descent were free to choose to either marry, presumably among themselves, and settle at Nguiu "or to go as servants to the whites" on the mainland.¹⁰⁰ By 1917, twenty six children had been received at the mission, and in the same year eight boys and ten girls were being taught by a nun each morning.¹⁰¹ The presence of the Iwaidja and other mainland Aborigines, as well as Joe Cooper's family at Paru, had introduced the Tiwi to "foreign" indigenes and to people of mixed descent. This, no doubt, prepared the Islanders for the arrival of the children at the mission. It is not known, however, to what extent the Tiwi associated with the part-Aboriginal children while they were at Nguiu or what that relationship was like.

While the program established a basis for a more successful policy in later years when much younger part-Aboriginal children were brought to the Tiwi Islands from the mainland, Father Gsell had to acknowledge that the first experiment failed. While the children were under mission control they responded to the training. Back on the mainland, Gsell said, they lost all they had been taught.¹⁰² These children were in a difficult position. Europeans dominated the top rung of the social ladder of the Northern Territory, above the Asian community. Below the Asians and just above the traditional

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

Aborigines, who were on the bottom rung of the social ladder, were the people of mixed descent. European society frowned most scathingly upon the part-Aborigines.

Experienced bushmen had been concerned enough about Father Gsell's safety to advise him to carry a revolver as a deterrent to any possible Tiwi attack. Within a day of his arrival at Nguiu he discarded the firearm in favour of the power of prayer. In any case, the Tiwi who came to the mission proved to be very peaceful.¹⁰³ Agricultural activities progressed on the station, while families who visited the mission gradually began to leave their sons there if they displayed an interest in the employment and training opportunities offered.

With the education programme for the mainland children established, Gsell turned to schooling for the Tiwi children. Following discussion with some of the Tiwi elders, who in turn consulted at length with other Islanders, the first boys entered the school at Nguiu.¹⁰⁴ Gsell does not say when this discussion occurred but it did involve much debate, dissension and argument among the Tiwi before agreement was reached. The youngsters, stated the missionary, were not forced to remain in the school if they decided to return to their families away from the mission.¹⁰⁵ If boys were not initiated, in Father Gsell's opinion, they were possible candidates for conversion to Christianity but many years were to pass before the first of the boys were baptised.¹⁰⁶ A European-style education and religious instruction, resulted in some boys wishing to stay on the mission, and later seeking to become Christians in order to avoid having to go through the initiation process.¹⁰⁷ Tiwi initiation, although a long process, did not involve any other form of physical operation except hair depilation and the unique body scarring of the Islanders. Furthermore, it is not clear when religious instruction was first introduced to the Tiwi students, Nouyoux pointing out in 1917, that such instruction was for the children of mixed descent only.¹⁰⁸ And, there is no indication as to when Tiwi girls were first admitted to the school but around 1916, Gsell had discussed a special school for girls. Gsell did not consider co-education practical. Whatever the system the school was a strong magnet as were the trade goods available at the mission.¹⁰⁹

Although the mission received a Government subsidy this was inadequate to meet the cost of operating the station, especially as the number of workers and schoolchildren increased. Father Gsell began to develop a large area of cultivation, hoping to sell the surplus produce in Darwin. There was a willing pool of labour among the Tiwi but with only hoes and "niggers' hands" available for such work, difficulty in producing the quantity of yams and sweet potatoes needed to feed just the workers.¹¹⁰ Without a constant supply of food at the mission, the Islanders came and went as they pleased, and the original plan of encouraging a settled village around the mission station was not to come to fruition for many years. A number of Tiwi were proving to be of value in the cutting and milling of timber, all of which was, until 1917 at least, sold to provide an income for the mission.¹¹¹ Gsell compensated the traditional landowners for the timber cut on their land but where boundaries were not clear, diplomacy was required to resolve the question of payment. The Tiwi continued to see Nguiu as their territory and had no fear of losing their land to the missionaries.

While there were still a few Australian timber-getters on Melville Island, after the withdrawal of Joe Cooper to the mainland in 1916 the mission became the Tiwi's main focus for medicine and non-traditional food. When Father Courbon departed for war duty Gsell was appointed Honorary Sub-Protector of Aborigines for the area, thus becoming an honorary agent for the Government as well working for the Church.¹¹² He

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

was well placed to receive the small number of mainland “incorrigibles” sent to the mission by the Aboriginal Department in an attempt at rehabilitation.¹¹³ The Administrator felt that with the resignation of Joe Cooper as Sub-Protector, “the question of providing a reformation station on one of the islands will require serious consideration.” Bathurst Island Mission had assisted with the reception of mainland Aborigines who could not be trusted, “but obviously there are limits to the work of a mission as a reformatory” and settlement for incorrigibles was not established on Melville Island until 1940.¹¹⁴

In 1913, Spencer had seen the mission as a place to which mainland Aborigines could be safely transferred. However, he saw it as futile to transfer these strangers to the islands until such time as they could be placed under the personal protection of the missionaries, otherwise he felt they would be exterminated by the Tiwi.¹¹⁵ Gsell knew of this plan and reported in 1915 that “it is the Government’s intention to induce the mainland natives to settle gradually on Bathurst (Island) as large a number as possible”.¹¹⁶ Fortunately, this proposal never eventuated, avoiding any outbreak of inter-tribal tension and possibly a further degree of acculturation for the Tiwi.

A number of the Tiwi were not adverse to visiting the mainland. A small group had travelled to the buffalo country on the Coburg Peninsula and Gagadu (Kakadu) country with Joe Cooper when he left Melville Island in 1896. Upon Cooper’s return in 1905, others sailed to the mainland on various vessels, especially the buffalo-shooter’s own luggers.¹¹⁷ While a few women travelled to the mainland with their Iwaidja partners and children in 1915, other Islanders joined Cooper and his son Reuben in trepanging and in buffalo shooting and cutting timber in the Port Essington - Malay Bay area on the mainland.¹¹⁸ By 1913, a number of Melville Islanders were in Darwin, seeking employment and facing alcohol problems, as were mainland people in the town.¹¹⁹ Other Tiwi travelled by canoe to Gunn Point (Purumiju), to the north of Darwin, forming virtually a permanent camp there, from which a small number went to work for the Herbert Brothers at Koolpinyah Station. A few men gained employment on other cattle stations or joined droving teams. Over the years the wider world thus opened up for some, but not all, of the Tiwi as the Islanders worked in Darwin or joined the crews of pearling or trepanging luggers and coastal trading vessels. In Darwin, like other indigenous people, they were prohibited from certain areas of the town.¹²⁰ Two Tiwi men, Jerry Kerinauia and Malacca Jack (Malaccajanni) Tipiluntiana, played a small part in Territory history when they were employed by union organiser Harold Nelson in Darwin. They were sent with a letter to Administrator John Gilruth who read it and threw it down. Jerry took the letter back to Nelson, telling him that Gilruth would not accept it. Nelson became angry and union members marched on Government House resulting in Gilruth being sent away on a boat.¹²¹ Jerry was referring here to the rebellion against the administration in 1918.

The temporary, and very occasionally permanent, emigration of a slowly increasing number of Tiwi made further inroads into the Islanders’ customary culture and lifestyle.¹²² A bigger change came about from Gsell himself. Gsell was critical of the polygamous Tiwi marriage system which involved young girls being promised to older men. He was very sympathetic to women whom he thought were suffering in what he deemed to be forced unions.¹²³ While he saw the development of monogamous families as important to the Tiwi adopting a Christian way of life, he also realised the importance of the polygamous, promised bride system in the authority structure of Islander society.

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

With his belief that “sincere paganism is better than false Christianity”, he waited patiently and did not interfere with this custom until an opportunity came in the form of a girl seeking his assistance.¹²⁴

The story of how he unintentionally began the process of purchasing promised girls as his “wives” has been told a number of times, usually with inaccuracies and embellishments. Father Gsell told the story of his first purchase in a dramatised and, at times, ethnocentric style, setting the event in 1921.¹²⁵ According to Father William Henschke, who arrived at Nguuiu in late March, 1915, the incident took place not many months after his arrival, possibly early in 1916.¹²⁶ A man named Merapanui (Marepanui) Tipuamantumirri came to the mission, demanding that his promised wife, Ungaraminingamo (also spelt Wuramingamo), join him. The girl, who was of the Malauila band, from northern Bathurst Island, refused to go with him. Although various authors suggest that Ungaraminingamo was ten years of age at the time, Henschke stated that she was almost of marriageable age in Tiwi terms. This placed her in her early teens, supporting the comment in the *Daily Mail* of 13 August 1980 that Ungaraminingamo was fourteen years of age at the time. Gsell, who sympathised with Topsy, as she came to be known, did not wish to interfere with, and told her that she had to go with her new husband, to become his thirteenth wife.¹²⁷

In less than a week, late on a Sunday afternoon, she approached Gsell and Henschke again. She had been wounded in her leg by her husband and had fled from his camp. Merapanui, and some other men, all painted in white ochre, pursued her, demanding her return. Stalling for time, Gsell gave the men flour and tobacco, and told them he would talk to them next morning. That night Topsy stayed close to the mission house, while Gsell prayed and thought about the quandary he was in. Next morning the missionary set up on a table or bench trade goods to the then value of two pounds and offered to trade Topsy for the goods. After a long negotiation with his fellow Malauila, Merapanui agreed, telling Gsell that she must not be passed on to any other man.¹²⁸ This condition of the purchase was forgotten when in 1917 or early 1918 Father Gsell blessed the union between Topsy and her husband of her choice, Argau Portaminni.¹²⁹ Although this was not a recognised Church marriage as the couple were not baptised, it was the first of a number of formalised unions between non-Christian spouses at the mission over the ensuing years, each at the request of the parties concerned. As for Topsy, she gave birth to her first child on 1 December 1918, and later took on the name of Martina, by which she is best known, when she was baptised in danger of death in 1928.¹³⁰

A note of bias is evident in various writings on the purchase of Topsy (Martina). Merapanui is described as old and diseased. Bishop Gsell tells us that he was a “hairy anonymous old man” and “a hairy old man with leprosy”.¹³¹ In contrast, Tiwi people recall him as a big, very strong man. On one occasion when the mission lugger *St. Francis*, was stuck on a sandbank and could not be moved, Merapanui pushed it back into deeper water. His strength was indicated also when an “iron canoe” was washed up on Bathurst Island. Merapanui, assisted by several other men, tore pieces of metal off it to be made into axe heads.¹³²

Criticism is occasionally made of the Tiwi marriage system. Although Gsell was not sympathetic to the traditional custom, and undoubtedly would have liked to have seen it replaced with the monogamous European system of free choice of partners, he took

TIWI GIRLS PURCHASED BY BISHOP GSELL TO THE END OF 1918

NO.	NAME	BAND	PARENTS	PROMISED HUSBAND	YEAR BORN (APPROX.)	YEAR PURCHASED (APPROX.)
1.	Topsy (Martina) Wuramingamo	Malauia	Tupuapurama & Punukertemao	Merapanui Tipuamantumirri	c. 1900	1915 or 1916
2.	Carmel Pukwiu (Purkuaio)	Tikalauila	Turimpi Munkara & Rita Oomalla	Temalerua Pilakui	c. 1900	December 1916
3.	Makarilla	Tikalauila	Kuni & Tepukualao	Captain Tepeloralao	?	January 1917
4.	Marcella	Tikalauila	Pelingati & Tepunukumaio	Tungutalum	c. 1900	January 1917?
5.	Temalaimo	Tikalauila	Pokupulatameri & Popangerarena	Turimpi Munkara	c. 1902	November 1917?
6.	Daisy Celestina	Tikalauila	Montampuei & Kurrapalinea (Kurampalunga)	Mariono Munkara	c. 1905	March 1918
7.	Love (Lovey, Loffey)	Munupula	Mararapama & Keralautemao	Tungutalum	?	March 1918
8.	Dorothy Munkara	Tikalauila	Turimpi Munkara & Poingelepemiri	Monkey Pungatajara	?	1918
9.	Clara Matrepurula	Tikalauila	Turimpi & Porongelemapotemao	Cardo (Kartu) Pukulatameri	c. 1900	1918
10.	Mary Kelematuangia	Tikalauila	Pelingati & Tepunukemaio	Tungutalum	?	1918
11.	Lily Pilialu	Mingkuwila	Kelakureameri & Purumalinua	Mangerakepuio	c. 1903	November 1918
12.	Taipulaio	Tikalauila	Puantulura & Toporualao	Turimpi Munkara	?	3 December 1918
13.	Violet Potoparaolo	Tikalauila	Tepelempuetemiri & Mateloapumula	Joseph Puli	c. 1904	December 1918
14.	Myra Tekiningalao	Malauila	Keripu Puruntatameri & Moloto	Tekotomoka	c. 1902	December 1918

Fig. 14 Source: From list prepared by the late Father John Cosgrove with additional research by John Morris.

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

care not to actively campaign against it.¹³³ Others were not so understanding. Perkins wrote,

*It is these tribal laws and customs that are the greatest extension of the Kingdom of Christ among the aborigines, and particularly the laws relating to marriage. To them is due the general practice of polygamy and child marriage, with the usual train of evil consequences, wife stealing and trading, dwindling population, etc.*¹³⁴

Criticism of the role of Tiwi women in traditional marriages was also made by a missionary who served at Nguiu in the late 1930s:

*A woman is not free for one day from the time she is born into this world. She comes into the world the property of some man and remains so till the day she dies. Even if her husband should die before she does another member of the tribe immediately claims her with no reference whatsoever to her wishes in the matter.*¹³⁵

By assisting Topsy (Martina) Father Gsell had unwittingly manipulated the marriage system. He saw the freeing of Topsy from her arranged marriage as a victory for Tiwi women. He did not, however, take advantage of the situation by actively seeking to purchase other promised girls, as is commonly thought. Gradually, he was approached by men offering to sell not only babies and young girls but, in later years, older girls and mature aged women who were widows. Gsell was careful with such approaches and not all “wives” offered to him were accepted and purchased.¹³⁶ By the end of 1918, some fourteen girls had been purchased, three being offered by the one man. Gsell is credited with purchasing 150 girls and women up to the time of his departure from Nguiu in 1938 with seven of these girls having European or Asiatic fathers. In 1937, Gsell stated that he purchased 142 women claiming that smoke signals spread the word that he was purchasing “wives”.¹³⁷ He may have been referring to rumour spreading his availability as there is no record or island talk of the use of smoke signals by the Tiwi.

Gsell had advised Gilruth, the Territory Administrator, of the circumstances of the purchases of the girls. Consequently, when a request was received from the Department of External Affairs for Gsell to explain the purchases, Gilruth was able to satisfy its curiosity.¹³⁸ While the mission involuntarily undermined the traditional polygyny and gerontocracy of Islander society, at the behest of some Islanders and to partially meet the policies of the Church, the customary system of marriage between matrilineal clans remained.¹³⁹ Hart, Pilling and Goodale state that the girls still did not actually have a free choice of partners. Instead, each girl married a young man to whom she was tentatively promised, the man being further down the line of possible husbands.¹⁴⁰ Totally free choice marriage gradually came about but Father Gsell’s efforts introduced the concept of marriage of partners of approximately equal age and monogamous unions. As late as the 1950s and 1960s these unions occasionally led to parental concern or inter-group arguments and violence. It is difficult to ascertain whether in those early years Gsell was fully aware of the important role wives played in the food-gathering sector of the Tiwi economy, as well as the part polygamy played in Tiwi politics. Donovan felt that Gsell “...knew the Tiwi too well to entertain illusions. Their comprehension of the new marriage pattern probably represented a modification of traditional ways, but not a fundamental break.”¹⁴¹ Lee, likewise, points out that while the girls married young men, they did so “...apparently still through traditional channels.”¹⁴²

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

In other words, in a majority of cases the young Tiwi still married partners who were politically correct for them. In the years beyond the period of this particular research project Gsell was to learn a little more about the intricacies of Tiwi marriage customs. In about 1926, he learnt that Topsy (Martina) and Argau had followed tradition by handing over their infant daughter Elizabeth to a young man who stood in the position of son-in-law to Topsy (Martina). Gsell thereafter ensured that such a situation would not occur again with the children of girls purchased by him by having prospective spouses, as well as the parents, agree to the foregoing of their rights to the girls in return for a consideration of trade goods.

Scanlon criticised the seemingly ethnocentric language used by Gsell to describe the circumstances and concerns related to his buying of the girls.¹⁴³ Referring to mission intervention into tribal marriages, he also attacks the manner in which missionaries, including Gsell, “imposed Christian judgements on a system which was totally different.” Scanlon fails to differentiate between the direct action taken by some missionaries in respect of polygamous marriages in indigenous communities and the indirect manner in which Gsell sought to release some girls from proposed unions through the considered purchase of females offered to him. The downside of arranged marriage practices is that this can mean that husbands have to wait longer to get married the first time, and that the system excludes a few men from obtaining wives unless these are elderly and widowed. Scanlon is scathing of missionaries, including Father Gsell, for the manner in which they viewed the beating of indigenous women by their husbands. “Missionaries”, he wrote, “observing the punishment for transgression of tribal rules were not, by and large, capable of viewing such things dispassionately.”¹⁴⁴ Scanlon confuses punishment for the breaking of a law with the beatings inflicted upon some women by their spouses. For example, a staff member wrote that on Bathurst Island

*many an ugly scar these poor ill-used creatures bear from being beaten with waddies or red hot firesticks. Still no redress is possible since the law of the family life of the natives is based, not on love, but on fear.*¹⁴⁵

While some boys asked to be made Christians to escape initiation, initiation ceremonies were to continue for many years.

Various visitors called in at Nguiu from time to time, leading to favourable reports on both the work of the missionaries and the Tiwi themselves. Spencer and Gilruth visited the mission on several occasions, Spencer proposing the establishment of a second mission station further north on Bathurst Island when Nguiu was firmly established. Medical officers, some of whom, such as H.K. Fry, were also interested in anthropology, also accepted the hospitality of the mission. Gerald Hill, a Government Entomologist, and explorer Price Conigrave used about forty Tiwi as carriers during their exploration of Bathurst Island in 1914, and were pleased with their efforts.¹⁴⁶ A party of nine Darwin residents which visited Nguiu in 1915 was impressed by the physical appearance of the Tiwi, compared with the Aborigines around Darwin, while the missionaries were seen to be in a class of heroes.¹⁴⁷ Another group of visitors, in 1916, were impressed by the progress of the mission, while “the aboriginals of Bathurst Island, with their weird corroborees, dances, etc., formed quite an interesting item in the trip.”¹⁴⁸

There were visits of a more serious nature, one involving the only recorded serious threat against the missionaries.¹⁴⁹ In mid 1916 a visit to the Tiwi Islands by Chief Inspector J.T. Beckett of the Aboriginal Department resulted in discussions with Tiwi

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

elders about a plot to murder the missionaries and abduct the girls on the mission station. Apart from a newspaper report no record of this alleged plot is now readily available. A fight, one of several, took place at Paru at the same time, representatives of the various bands warring over women. Beckett crossed to Paru and told the men they were to use throwing sticks only, not spears, in their fighting. He then escorted the two men at the centre of the plot to Darwin. This alleged incident apart, relationships between the Tiwi and mission staff were usually amicable, although occasionally individuals became disgruntled over some real or perceived injustice or other incident.

The Commonwealth demonstrated its inability to understand and come to terms with indigenous land tenure, and the need for the lives of traditional people to be interrupted as little as possible, when the islands were subjected to another official visitor. In June 1918, H.M. Trower, Director of Lands, inspected Melville Island in search of land for the settlement of returned soldiers. Tiwi guides were used by Trower, who fortunately for the Islanders, found the island to be unsuitable. He visited Lee's timber camp on Melville Island, and was impressed by the Nguui mission, which by this time was not only cutting and sawing timber but was also selling fruit, vegetables and eggs in Darwin to help meet its costs. In a financially tight situation the mission was unable to pay cash wages to its workers for some years. To encourage self-respect the mission policy remained one of work in exchange for food and other items required by the Tiwi. Apart from the relatively few Tiwi who had migrated to the mainland for employment, the majority of the community had little if any concept of the use or value of money in those early years of mission life, a concept many historians today would find hard to accept. Food and trade goods such as tomahawks, axes, tobacco and loin cloths or lap laps were more important to those living in a customary or near customary life-style than cash although such a method of distribution is now heavily criticised.

Pilling states that the last sneak attack by Tiwi against Tiwi took place in 1911, this type of attack ending with the arrival of Gsell. Inter-band and inter-totem fights were now fought only on an arranged basis.¹⁵⁰ When fighting occurred on the station the combatants were instructed to take their violence into the bush but no action was taken by Gsell to ban such conflict. Punishment came in the form of either a loss of rations or police action for theft of food. In 1916, for instance, a simple theft led to inter-tribal conflict. With a traditional background of communal sharing, young men of the Tikalauila band stole sweet potatoes from the mission garden. Informed of the theft by a Malauila elder, Gsell stopped food and tobacco rations. As a result, young men from the Tikalauila and Malauila bands fought with throwing sticks ("murrukuwunga"). Seeing one of the combatants bleeding heavily, the older men initiated the first of what became several fights, drawing in men from other bands and "skin" or totemic groups. The fighting ended when men from the Tikalauila and Malauila bands were speared after Gsell told them to fight off the mission.

The missionaries thus used positive and negative incentives to establish a European code of behaviour among the Tiwi. The seeds of a new way of life, of another culture, were gradually sown by the mission. The Tiwi accepted some aspects of the new lifestyle and culture, practising these along side many of their traditional customs, while not accepting others. Father Gsell remained patient and optimistic with his policy of gradually introducing Christianity. He recognised the children as the main targets, acknowledging that it would not be possible to convert the adults from their traditional ways. He felt "rigid tribal laws and customs" were an insuperable obstacle to

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

conversions in those early years.¹⁵¹ Although thirty one people were baptised on the mission up until the end of 1918, these were either children of mixed descent from the mainland, Tiwi who were baptised while in danger of death or young babies brought by their parents to be Christened.¹⁵² There were no voluntary baptisms during this time. Father Gsell has unjustly been criticised for his failure to gain converts.¹⁵³

By 1918 Nguiu was firmly established as a mission station for the people of the Tiwi Islands, not just for those on Bathurst Island. The departure of Cooper in 1916 meant that the mission was now the centre for European medicines, food and materials for all Tiwi except for a few who would rely to some extent on the timber camps on Melville island until the early 1920s. Not that all Tiwi visited the mission on a regular basis or that many lived permanently on the station by 1918. In 1917, Gsell could say that he had recorded the names of some 400 Tiwi. The Islanders learnt, more than they had from the buffalo shooters, that Australian society, through forces of the Government and the mission, had the right to impose sanctions on them for the breaking of these European imposed laws, laws foreign to the Islanders. Foreign too, were some of the "crimes" perpetrated by individual Tiwi or small groups of Tiwi, such as the taking of produce from the mission garden. In a society where goods were shared such actions were not crimes in the eyes of the Tiwi. Serious crimes, intentional or unintentional, carried out by Tiwi were extremely rare but Gsell and his fellow missionaries also quietly attempted to instil into the Tiwi the dangers of feuding, especially where spears were used.

By 1918 also, the grounds had been laid for a gradual intrusion into some of the long held customs and beliefs of the Tiwi. Although it had begun by accident, Gsell had made a startling innovation by bargaining with old tribesmen for their young wives. A European-based education was teaching some of the Tiwi children a new form of culture, while travel to the mainland, especially when this increased after 1915, taught the Islanders that not only were there the several Aboriginal tribes that they knew of on the mainland but there were European-Australian centres of settlement and there were other, even more different indigenous groups. The attraction of employment and living at the mission, even on a temporary basis, meant that the traditional calendar of Tiwi movement, ritual and meetings was disrupted. Residence on the station for most of the year, however, was still many years away for most of the people.

Despite these disruptions to the customary lifestyle, the mission protected the Tiwi from many of the worst aspects of outside influence. Criticism has been made of the degradation of Aborigines who sought to wear European clothing and to eat European food. Writing of *Central Australian Aborigines dressed in European clothes in 1937*, Croll considered that it "transformed them from kings to beggars; the borrowed rags were an ass's head upon the natural man."¹⁵⁴ The "sturdy naked and lithe" Warlpiri people who came into the Granites goldfield in the Tanami Desert reportedly became lazy, dirty and subject to skin diseases when they took to wearing clothes.¹⁵⁵ Stanner goes even further, arguing that once Aborigines were settled on a mission or station they had reached a parasitic stage where they could never return to the traditional ways and were half-way to extinction.¹⁵⁶ This cannot be said to be the case with the Tiwi who gravitated around the mission. There was no force to be clothed and their traditional cultural and economic practices continued. Work was encouraged for those who desired it, either on or off the mission. At Nguiu there was no gross abuse of their labour. Moreover, those employed on their own land could maintain a relationship with

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

traditional lifestyle. Father Gsell respected their religious beliefs even if he referred to it as paganism however he was honest enough to admit that full conversion was unlikely. Some historians have emphasised the failure of missionaries to convert the “heathen” Aborigines and they have pointed to the rejection of the missionaries and the Christian religion by indigenous people.¹⁵⁷ In the case of Father (later Bishop) Francis Xavier Gsell, there was no failure to convert the Tiwi, although this was to take some years beyond 1918. He could have banned local cultural practices and the customary lifestyle, even forced people to attend church services through threats to withhold their food rations, as occurred on some other missions. He did none of these. Gsell stood out amongst missionaries of his time, just as the Spanish priest Nicholas Emo did at Lombadina and Love at Kunmunya. He demonstrated a determination to set up an educational and industrial training institution. But he did not attempt to institutionalise the people, nor force the Tiwi to stay on the station. Nor did he set out to destroy their traditional culture and this decision helped to save much of the culture. Gsell saw the need to practise charity and honesty with the Islanders, compensating traditional owners for timber cut on their land. European visitors were surprised to see him physically working beside the Tiwi who offered their labour. Following the purchase of Topsy (Martina) Ungaraminingamo, he had the opportunity to change the customary marriage system forcibly by actively demanding the sale of other young girls who were brought into Nguuu. This he did not do. He may have failed to understand and appreciate aspects of the culture and lifestyle, and no doubt, when he sought to punish those whom he saw as wrongdoers friction did arise for a time. Nevertheless, he was loved and respected by the Tiwi, and his memory is still revered by them. This was illustrated by the active participation of the Islanders in the anniversary of the foundation of the mission held in 1961.

There was a judicial system which protected them while prosecuting wrongdoers. They learnt to ask for medical treatment and, moreover, through personal experience or stories they learnt of a wider and intriguing world beyond their own cosmos. A number, as we have seen, were quick to take advantage of this, learning new skills which assisted them to find employment away from the islands. More importantly, free of European intrusion apart from the mission, the Tiwi population did not decline as occurred in many mainland tribes. They were fortunate, too, in that the establishment of the mission meant that they did not have to compete with Europeans and Asians for resources, something that would have occurred if the planned agricultural leases had gone ahead on Bathurst Island. The Tiwi situation in 1918 can be clearly seen when it is realised how different their circumstances were to indigenous people elsewhere as described by Finlayson:

Justification for such views (that Aborigines were inferior and “a poor piece of work”) may perhaps be found in the miserable wreckage of the race which is strewn about the margins of settlement; for nothing is more striking than the swift demoralization and degeneration which follow the renunciation of his way of life for one of dependence on whites.¹⁵⁸

By comparison, the Tiwi still occupied their islands which they recognised as their own property, conflicts with outsiders had ceased, there had been no imprisonment or executions of group members for attacks upon Europeans, and relatively little acculturation had occurred. Although the level of their isolation had diminished, they remained a unique people in Australia’s indigenous society, and, in their eyes, they had kept the majority of outside peoples from their shores.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ¹ Sowden, W.J., *The Northern Territory As It Is: A Narrative of the South Australian Parliamentary Party's Trip*, Adelaide: W.K Thomas, 1882, p. 28.
- ² Quoted in the *Government Resident's Report on the Northern Territory, 1887*, p. 7. See also Austin, Tony, *Simply the Survival of the Fittest: Aboriginal Administration in South Australia's Northern Territory 1863-1910*, Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory, 1992, p. 33.
- ³ Austin, *op.cit.*, p. 36
- ⁴ Reynolds, Henry, *Frontier*, St. Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1996, p. 6.
- ⁵ Austin, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
- ⁶ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 118.
- ⁷ The diocesan title came from the names of the abandoned settlement and fort of Victoria, on the coast of the Northern Territory, and the town of Palmerston (later Darwin).
- ⁸ Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Archives, Kensington Monastery (hereafter MSCA), Box 1, No. 0564, Folder 1, "Bathurst Island Founding".
- ⁹ Perkins, A., "Bathurst Island and Palm Island Missions". In Murphy, M.J. and Moynihan F., (eds.), *The National Eucharistic Congress*, Melbourne: The Advocate Press, 1936, p. 191. By 1909 Gsell was appointed a Monsignor, but I use the term "Father" here, as he was commonly known by that title until 1938, when he became Bishop of the Northern Territory
- ¹⁰ NA Series A1 Item 38/33126; SASR GRS10/18025-18211, Government Resident - Inward Correspondence, NT Reg. No.18126/1909, Gsell to Government Resident, 3/5/1909.
- ¹¹ SASR GRS4, Letters Sent by the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, Benda to Aeneas Gunn, 21/11/1898; *South Australian Register*, 15/4/1897; SASR GRS1/210/1897, Kingsborough to the Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 17/5/1897.
- ¹² *Northern Territory Times*, 26/8/1904.
- ¹³ NA Series A1 Item 38/33126, NT Reg. No. 1909/75, Government Resident to Minister Controlling the Northern Territory, 5/5/1909, and Benda to Government Resident, 12/6/1909.
- ¹⁴ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42; Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 80.
- ¹⁵ The original letter, carrying the government stamp of receipt, is held in the Bishop's House, Darwin; copy in MSCA.
- ¹⁶ Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.
- ¹⁷ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 66.
- ¹⁸ Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.
- ¹⁹ Leske, Everard (Ed.), *Hermannsburg: A Vision and A Mission*, Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1977, pp. 17-19; Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 136. The Hermannsburg Mission Society failed in its efforts on the mission and sold it to another Lutheran organisation which carried on the work at Hermannsburg.
- ²⁰ Durack, Mary, *Sons in the Saddle*, London: Constable, 1987, p. 215.
- ²¹ NA Series A1 Item 38/33126, "Bathurst Island - Reserve for Aborigines", Waters to Government Resident, 31/5/1910.
- ²² Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 126; Austin, *op. cit.*, p. 102. Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 188.
- ²³ Long, *op. cit.*, pp. 37 and 39; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Harney (1957), *op. cit.*, pp.70-75; Gribble, J.B., *Proposals for Government Settlement on Melville Island*, typescript, Native Affairs Branch, Darwin, undated (c.1940); *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 31, 20/2/1941.

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

- ²⁴ Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 83. No reference to the cessation of the sales has been located in the relevant files, but such an action may not have been recorded by the authorities.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*; NA Series A1640 Item 1910/570, Minutes to NT Reg. No. 334, 1907, 23/9/1910.
- ²⁶ NA Series A1640 Item 1910/570, Minutes to NT Reg. No. 334, 1907, 12/9/1910 and 28/9/1910.
- ²⁷ NA Series A1 Item 38/33126, Department of External Affairs (hereafter DEA) Memorandum No. 111/18105, 3/11/1911, states that four applications, each for 5000 acres (2023.5 ha), were approved by the Minister for the Northern Territory on 1/8/1910.
- ²⁸ NA Series A1640 Item 1910/570, Gsell to Denny, 27/9/1910.
- ²⁹ Original document held in Bishop's House, Darwin; NA Series A1640 Item 1910/570, Minister for the Northern Territory to Government Resident, 29/9/1910; NA Series A1 Item 38/33126, NT Reg. No. 12/2319, memo from T.D. Bancroft, Lands Officer, 17/9/1912; MSCA, letter from Department of Home and Territories to Rev. A. Perkins, 16/6/1919.
- ³⁰ NA Series A1640 Item 1910/570, Minutes forming enclosure to NT No. 344, 1907, Memo dated 24/8/1911: Spencer and Gilruth personally requested the Minister to take action to have the whole of Bathurst Island proclaimed a reserve; NA Series A1 Item 38/33126, Spencer to Minister for External Affairs, 19/1/1912, and Secretary, DEA, to Administrator, 26/9/1912; NA Series A431/1 Item 51/1294, Internal Memo NT12/10380, 12/6/1912.
- ³¹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers 1911*, Vol. 3. Northern Territory, Report of the Government Resident for the Year 1910, p. 7, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printer, 20/12/1911; Report by Police Inspector Paul Foelsche, 1899, quoted in Stone, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-117
- ³² Reid, *op. cit.*, p. 187; Powell, *op. cit.*, p. 161; C.D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970, p. 213; Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-194 and 255-256.
- ³³ *Northern Territory of Australia. Report on operations since the transfer to the Commonwealth*, *op. cit.*, pp. 9 and 12.
- ³⁴ NA Series A431/1 Item 51/1294, Gilruth to Hunt (Secretary, D.E.A.), 9/9/1912.
- ³⁵ *Commonwealth of Australia Gazette*, No. 3, 18/1/1913.
- ³⁶ Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 86.
- ³⁷ *Northern Territory Times*, 14/4/1911. The report incorrectly referred to "the proposed Jesuit Aboriginal Mission Station".
- ³⁸ Gsell (1956) *op. cit.*, p. 45, speaks of going "up the valley" and "examining other creeks and inlets", while Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 87, says he explored further up Apsley Strait with Lee before choosing Nguiu. Nguiu is also called We-u.
- ³⁹ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 45 ; Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 88.
- ⁴⁰ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 45-46; Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.
- ⁴¹ Donovan, Peter, "Gsell, Francis Xavier". In Nairn and Serle, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
- ⁴² Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 44.
- ⁴³ *Northern Territory Times*, "Alleged Gold Discovery", 26/8/1904.
- ⁴⁴ SASR GRS10/17602/1908, Olsen to Government Resident, 2/10/1908, and Government Resident to Olsen, also 2/10/1908. In exchange for the goods and food provided, Olsen was to collect Tiwi artifacts for the Government Resident.
- ⁴⁵ *Northern Territory Times*, "Exploring Bathurst Island", 17/6/1910.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ⁴⁶ *Northern Territory Times*, "Exploring Bathurst Island", 1/7/1910; *Parliamentary Papers 1910, Proceedings of the Parliament of South Australia*, 1910, Volume 3, Document 79, Adelaide: Government Printer, 1911.
- ⁴⁷ Harris, John, *One Blood*, Sutherland: Albatross Books, 1990, p. 783.
- ⁴⁸ Price, A. Grenfell, *Island Continent, Aspects of the Historical Geography of Australia and its Territories*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1972, p. 26
- ⁴⁹ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 40; Crawford, Sue, *Spears to Crosses: An Anthropological Analysis of the Social Systems of Missionaries in Northern Australia*, B.A. Hons. Thesis, Australian National University, 1978.
- ⁵⁰ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 47, and Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 91, give this date.
- ⁵¹ Interview with Father W. Henschke, Darwin, 2/9/1964.
- ⁵² Anonymous undated MS on Nguuu (Father Greg Abbott?), in MSC Archives, p. 3.
- ⁵³ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 47-49.
- ⁵⁴ Flynn, Frank, *Northern Gateway*, Sydney: F.E. Leonard, 1963, p. 90.
- ⁵⁵ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 47; Gsell (unpublished MS), *op. cit.*, p. 94.
- ⁵⁶ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- ⁵⁷ Interview with Paw Paw Puruntatameri, Jerry Kerinauia, Gregory Orsto, Benedict Munkara and July Portaminni, Nguuu, 29/7/1964. Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- ⁵⁸ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 50, and Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 97.
- ⁵⁹ *Northern Territory Times*, 7/7/1911.
- ⁶⁰ Healey, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
- ⁶¹ Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 26 and 135. Biskup, P., *Not Slaves Not Citizens*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1973, p. 124, is likewise critical of New Norcia, but more so for its economic approach and its emphasis on industrial training rather than education.
- ⁶² *Report of the Horn Scientific Expedition to Central Australia*, Adelaide, 1897, quoted in Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 210.
- ⁶³ Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
- ⁶⁴ Spencer, W.B., "Preliminary Report on the Aborigines of the Northern Territory", 20/5/1913, in *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year ended 31 December, 1912*, p. 51.
- ⁶⁵ Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 211.
- ⁶⁶ Harris, *op. cit.*, p. 531.
- ⁶⁷ Price, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- ⁶⁸ Biskup, *op. cit.*, pp. 45, 126.
- ⁶⁹ Rowley, C.D., *A Matter of Justice*, Canberra: ANUP, 1981, p.162.
- ⁷⁰ Hempel, Robin, "Gsell, Francis Xavier". In D. Carment, R. Maynard and A. Powell (eds.), *Northern Territory Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 1: to 1945*, Darwin: Northern Territory University Press, 1990, p. 133.
- ⁷¹ Breinl and Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 31; Price, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26
- ⁷² Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 40.
- ⁷³ Rowley, (1962), *op. cit.*, p. 162.
- ⁷⁴ Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

- ⁷⁵ Reid, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-140; *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, 3/4/1912, p. 10; *The Age*, 3/4/1912, p.11: The Plymouth Brethren staff blamed the attitude of the Aboriginal Department for the closure of the home, telling Baldwin Spencer "...that in alienating the sympathy of the Christian church (sic) much harm would be done to the aborigines."
- ⁷⁶ Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 213.
- ⁷⁷ Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 135
- ⁷⁸ Spencer (1912), *op. cit.*, p. 9.
- ⁷⁹ Lee (1988), *op. cit.*, p. 4; Flynn (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 91; MSCA, Nouyoux, E., Report about Darwin and Bathurst Island, (typescript), Sacred Heart Monastery, Kensington, 25/9/1917, pp. 9-10; MSCA, Gsell, Father F.X., Report of the Diocese of Victoria and Palmerston, (typescript), Sacred Heart Monastery, Kensington, 26/7/1915, p. 9.
- ⁸⁰ Gunn, Aeneas, "Report on Bathurst Island, Northern Territory, South Australia", 23/7/1897. In Anon, *Bathurst Island, Northern Territory of Australia, Its History and Resources*, Melbourne, 1897, p. 20.
- ⁸¹ Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, pp. 140-141.
- ⁸² Bowditch, Jim, "Paw Paw (an aged pagan) Had A Name For Him". In *Catholic Weekly*, 29/6/1961, p. 11.
- ⁸³ *Parliamentary Papers, 1911, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia*. Vol. 3. Northern Territory, Report of the Government Resident for the Year 1910, p. 7, Melbourne: Government Printer for the State of Victoria for the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, 20/12/1911.
- ⁸⁴ *Report of the Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1911*, p. 5.
- ⁸⁵ Hart, C.W.M, "The sons of Turimpi". In *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 1954, p. 247-248.
- ⁸⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁷ Hempel, *op. cit.*, p. 133; Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 910.
- ⁸⁸ Murphy, *op.cit.*, p. 77, indicates that Courbon was still at Nguuiu after Father William Henschke's arrival in 1915. *The Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Years 1915-16 and 1916-17*, p. 45, reports Courbon's departure without providing a date.
- ⁸⁹ Bertolini, J. in "Mgr. Gsell Francis-Xavier, M.S.C.", (typescript) notes prepared in Rome, 21/3/1981 (MSCA, Box 1, No. 0564), pp. Not indicated in copy. Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 10. Goodale received this erroneous advice from W.E. Harney in 1954.
- ⁹⁰ Pye, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-61; *Catholic Weekly*, "Bathurst Island loses its 'true priest' ", 10/10/1982, offers a brief insight into McGrath and his use of the Tiwi language. Lee, Jennifer R., *Ngawurrangurumagi Nginingawila Ngapangirraga*, Nguuiu: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1993, p. ix, points out the complexity of the Tiwi language.
- ⁹¹ Nouyoux, *op. cit.*, p. 11; Docker, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
- ⁹² Krastins, *op. cit.*, p. 48.
- ⁹³ In *Sydney Morning Herald*, "Owner of 121 'Wives' ", 18/9/1937, Gsell spells "Angawaringani" as "Ngerengani".
- ⁹⁴ Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 93.
- ⁹⁵ Gsell (1956).
- ⁹⁶ Gsell (undated MS), *op.cit.*, p. 123.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 123; 1912. *The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (Session 1912). Vol. 3. -Papers Presented to Parliament*, Melbourne: Victorian Government Printer, 1912, *Report of the Acting Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1911*, p. 599, was possibly premature when reporting that a school *had* been established on the mission.
- ⁹⁸ Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 34; Stanley, *op. cit.*, p. 10, gives a figure of seven part-Aborigines arriving with the two nuns.
- ⁹⁹ MSCA, Return to the Superior-General of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, Rome, 10/3/1913, (typescript) Bathurst Island Mission, pp. not indicated.
- ¹⁰⁰ Gsell, Report of the Diocese of Victoria and Palmerston, (typescript), Sacred Heart Monastery, Kensington, 1915, p. 8. In an obvious error the number of children of Aboriginal - non-Aboriginal descent in the Nguiu orphanage is given as seventy.
- ¹⁰¹ Nouyoux, *op. cit.*, pp. 8, 9 and 11.
- ¹⁰² Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 123.
- ¹⁰³ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p. 34.
- ¹⁰⁴ Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, pp. 153-156.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 156. Healey, T.E.A., *And Far From Home*, London: Michael Joseph, 1936, p. 223, says the boys were given a choice between Christian or Tiwi practices.
- ¹⁰⁶ Baptismal Records, St. Francis Xavier Mission Church, Nguiu.
- ¹⁰⁷ Hoyle, I., "Missions to our Aborigines". In *Messenger*, 1/2/1965, p. 17; MSCA Unpublished MS (Abbott?), *op. cit.*, p. 23; AA (Darwin) Ref. A431/51/1294, Anon (obviously Father F.X. Gsell), Report About Bathurst Island Mission, (typescript) undated (the contents indicate the year to be 1934), incomplete copy, pp. 9-10; MSCA, complete copy of above report, also unsigned and undated.
- ¹⁰⁸ Nouyoux, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ¹⁰⁹ Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- ¹¹⁰ MSCA, Bishop Gsell Box (unnumbered), "Bishop Gsell folder 3", Edward Nouyoux, letter from Darwin (to MSC Provincial), 5/6/1917, p. 3.
- ¹¹¹ Nouyoux (25/9/1917), *op. cit.*, p. 8; *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Years 1915-16 and 1916-17*, p. 14; Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, p. 189.
- ¹¹² *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Years 1915-1916 and 1916-17*, p. 14.
- ¹¹³ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 126.
- ¹¹⁴ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1914-15*, p. 24.
- ¹¹⁵ Spencer (1913), *op. cit.*, p. 50.
- ¹¹⁶ Gsell (1915), *op. cit.*, p. 8.
- ¹¹⁷ Spencer (1928), *op. cit.*, p. 126.
- ¹¹⁸ Interview with Albert Croker, Paru, 20/5/1963; Poignant, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-33.
- ¹¹⁹ *Report of the Administrator of the Northern Territory for the Year 1913*, p. 36. At the same time, "inveterate loafers" among the mainlanders were being sent to Melville Island.
- ¹²⁰ *Northern Territory Times*, 7/1/1915.
- ¹²¹ Interview with Jerry Kerinaiaua, Nguiu, 26/8/1964.
- ¹²² See, for instance, Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, p. 41.

The Door Is Flung Open - The Mission, The Tiwi and the Wider World

- ¹²³ See, for instance, Gsell's comments in *The Annals*, "Our Aboriginal Mission", 1/9/1934, pp. 523-525. In *Evening News*, "In Unknown Australia. How Abo. Girls Were Slaves to Cruel Custom", 5/10/1929, Gsell is critical of the treatment of the Tiwi girls by the older men.
- ¹²⁴ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 61.
- ¹²⁵ Gsell(1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 80-91.
- ¹²⁶ Interview with Father William Henschke, Darwin, 2/9/1964.
- ¹²⁷ Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 41. *Daily Express*, "124 girls cost about two pounds apiece", 29/3/1934, offers a highly dramatised and inaccurate version of the incident.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid*; Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 80-87; Gsell (undated MS), *op. cit.*, pp. 160-167; MSCA, Anon (Gsell?) undated report (1934?), *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.
- ¹²⁹ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 87. Angau is also recorded as Agau and Angau.
- ¹³⁰ Baptismal Records, Catholic Church, Nguui.
- ¹³¹ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, p. 86; Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 41. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 115, refers to Merapanui as "a gnarled old tribesman". Beatty, (1965), *op. cit.*, p. 33, claims that "the old bride-groom jabbered and danced with rage."
- ¹³² Interview with Barney Tipuamantumirri and Michael Tipungwuti, Nguui, 6/3/1965.
- ¹³³ Anon (Gsell?), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.
- ¹³⁴ Perkins, *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- ¹³⁵ Anon (Abbott?), *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- ¹³⁶ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 90-98.
- ¹³⁷ Sydney Morning Herald, 18/9/1937, *op. cit.*
- ¹³⁸ Gsell (1956), *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92. Flynn (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 94; Gsell (1956), Pye, *op. cit.*, p. 42, and Scanlon, *op. cit.*, p. 91, refer to the Administrator as the "Commissioner". Bertolini, *op. cit.*, wrote that the Administrator had to justify the purchases to "the Queen's Representative". In later years Gsell was attacked by the Communist Party for the buying of the girls.
- ¹³⁹ Venbrux, E., *A Death in the Islands*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, p. 41; Bell, Diane, "Choose Your Mission Wisely:", in Swain, T. and Rose, D.B. (Eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions*, Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1988, p. 342.
- ¹⁴⁰ Hart, Pilling and Goodale, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
- ¹⁴¹ Donovan, *op. cit.*, p. 135.
- ¹⁴² Lee (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 4.
- ¹⁴³ Scanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 91 and 93.
- ¹⁴⁴ Scanlon, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-89.
- ¹⁴⁵ Anon (Abbott?), *op. cit.*, p. 17.
- ¹⁴⁶ Conigrave, *op. cit.*, pp. 157-179.
- ¹⁴⁷ Moloney, *op. cit.*, pp. 78 and 80.
- ¹⁴⁸ *Northern Territory Times*, "An Island Trip", 4/5/1916.
- ¹⁴⁹ *The Advertiser*, "Missionaries In Peril. A Plot to Murder Them", 15/7/1916, p. 9; Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, pp. 258-260.
- ¹⁵⁰ Pilling (1957), *op. cit.*, pp. 194, 254-256.

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- ¹⁵¹ MSCA, "Bishop Gsell Box" (unnumbered), Anon, *Bishop Gsell and the Bathurst Island Mission*, undated but written after July 1961, pp. 1-2.
- ¹⁵² Baptism Record, St. Francis Xavier Church, Nguiu.
- ¹⁵³ MSCA, Box 1, Folder 23, "Bathurst Island, Newspapers, Articles, etc. Miscellaneous", *Monsignor Francis Xavier Gsell (1872-1960), Bishop of the Diocese of Port Darwin*, extract from Kittel, Rev. G., *Biographies of Some Bishops in Missionary Orders from Alsace*, Strasbourg, 1965. Kittel's figures for baptisms at Nguiu are, in any event, incorrect.
- ¹⁵⁴ Croll, R.H., *Wide Horizons*, Sydney, 1937, p. 130, quoted in Rowse, Tim, "Aborigines as historical actors: evidence and inference". In *Historical Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 87, October, 1986, p. 186
- ¹⁵⁵ Baume, F.E., *Tragedy Track*, Sydney, 1933, p. 71, quoted in Rowse, op. cit., p. 185.
- ¹⁵⁶ Stanner, W.E.H., *White Man Got No Dreaming*, Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979, p. 12.
- ¹⁵⁷ Attwood, Bain, "Aborigines and academic historians: some recent encounters". In *Australian Historical Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 94, April, 1990, p. 128.
- ¹⁵⁸ Finlayson, H.H., *The Red Centre*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1948, p. 80.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this book has been to research the ethnohistory of Tiwi society up until 1918, and to explore the extent of their uniqueness. The decision was made to conclude this study at the end of 1918 for several reasons, a major factor being the fast developing relationship between the Islanders and the outside world after World War One, including the movement of Japanese manned pearling luggers into the region, the growing exposure of the Tiwi to Christianity and the ramifications of the Australian legal and administrative systems. These changes to the Tiwi cosmos constitute a much larger and diverse saga in Tiwi ethnohistory.

Visits to the Tiwi Islands by representatives of other cultures occurred over 300 years or more. The Tiwi being geographically, economically and socially isolated from the Australian mainland, their encounters with outside forces are not reminiscent of the contact history of most Aboriginal and Islander tribal groupings. They do, however, reflect to some degree the cultural interchange experienced by several indigenous groups on the continent's northern coastline. This interchange included (a) the long period of trade between the peoples of coastal Arnhem Land and trepangers from the Indonesian Archipelago, (b) meetings with Dutch explorers, (c) the relationships between Europeans in outposts on the coast of the Northern Territory and Cape York and local Aborigines and Islanders, (d) the establishment of coastal mission stations, and (e) employment with buffalo shooters on the Murganella Plain and the Alligator Rivers region.¹ Despite similarities between some of the historical epochs in the Tiwi Islands and those on the northern coastline of the mainland, the actual happenings and incidents in the islands were peculiar to the Tiwi community.

In various regions across Australia the grim events of the moving frontier and their aftermath have a place in the contact history of local groups. Such events have their repercussions in the attitude of members of some of these groups towards contemporary authority and non-Aboriginal society in general, or, as Reynolds states, "Past violence haunts the folk memory of many Aboriginal communities and influences contemporary behaviour."² Krastins points out that since at least 1843 propositions have been put forward as to the various stages or phases of intercultural contact experienced by the Aborigines.³ Although these premises vary in pattern, each involves (a) an initial meeting of the opposing cultures, sometimes peaceful, sometimes aggressive, (b) dispossession and a period of violence, and (c) a phase of dependency

TIWI FAMILIES OF THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES

Alimankinni	Pilamonila
Apautimi	Poantumilui
Bamliua	Po-onguwee
Babui	Popajua
Fernando (Tipuamantumirri)	Portaminni
Illortaminni	Porkilari
Intalui	Prolupamirri
Iramanduru	Puantulura
Johnson (Putapralamatua)	Puautjimi
Kantilla	Pukuamirri
Karakinni	Pukupulatumeri
Kelantumama	Pukwaarntillimirri
Kerinaiaua	Pullamonilla
Kitchmae (Bush)	Punguatji
Kulakuriamirri	Pupangamirri
Kulukulua	Puruntatameri
Malaworri	Temulantukka
Merami-nuwuka	Tepeloral
Minartuwee	Timaepatua
Minantingui	Tipakalippa
Minnapiinni	Tipilawurra
Mirikitchimala	Tipilingwutamirri
Mukwakinni	Tipiloura
Mungatopi	Tipiluntiana
Munkanome	Tipuamantumirri
Munkara	Tipungwuti
Mutunginni	Tipuranginamirri
Noom-mi-ereeka	Tipurui
Ooltummi (Oolamu)	Tuarapunilla
Ortso (Tuuntiana)	Tungutalum
Palipuaminni	Ulungura
Pangiraminni	Walamerapui
Pereauuntimirri	Warlapiinni
Pianteringilla	Wommatakimi
Pilakui	Wonaeamirri

Fig. 15 Source: Genealogical research by Father John Cosgrove and John Morris

The families have derived their surnames from the names of their respective patriarchs. Names which are no longer used are not included in this list.

in which the dispossessed rely on non-indigenous society, often on a continuing basis, while they, as the “conquered” people, seek to adjust to a new and imposed social and economic environment.⁴ The validity of such a theory is illustrated by Broome in his history of Aboriginal-European history since 1788.⁵

With two exceptions the episodes of intercultural meetings in the islands were brief and sporadic until 1905. In contrast, in most other regions of Australia, where more than one incident of inter-racial contact was experienced by an indigenous group, these usually occurred within a short period of time, not over a long period of time. While the Tiwi became noted for their ferocity, their attitude to outsiders changed somewhat after the permanent presence of outside forces was established in their islands in 1905. In comparison, such a presence in many other tribal localities led to a spread of guerilla warfare along the frontier of European settlement. Despite the virtual cessation of physical attacks upon outsiders by the Tiwi, suspicion of newcomers remained for some time.

The Tiwi Islanders were not suppressed by European-Australian violence or, decimated by introduced diseases, as was the fate of many other tribal groups such as those, for example, around Sydney or in Tasmania. Again, although the Tiwi gradually succumbed to the efforts of Christian missionaries, unlike Aborigines in south-western and south-eastern Australia they did not surrender all of their traditions to the new beliefs.⁶ Nor did they see themselves as being dispossessed of their land as had occurred to most mainland groups. They retained their sense of ownership of their islands in spirit if not in fact, although official recognition of traditional tenure was not legislated until 1976.⁷

Reynolds’ statement that on the frontier “conflict seems to have arisen most frequently from competing use of land rather than from trespass as such”, then, is true in only one instance where the Tiwi are concerned.⁸ This is the period between 1824 and 1829, when the British occupied the islands. As far as can be ascertained, the other incidents of conflict initiated by the Tiwi against visitors to their shores were in response to perceived acts of trespass. Until the late 1960s, historians argued that the indigenous reaction to the frontier conflict was not worth studying.⁹ This would have included the inter-racial events in the Tiwi Islands prior to 1905. Responding to the attitude of the historians, Reynolds stated that “It is time that Australian historians sought to understand the Aboriginal response to conquest and dispossession. To do so it is necessary to seriously explore the far side of the frontier and the underside of the caste-barrier.”¹⁰

In the case of the Tiwi, where relevant material exists it is possible to explore their reactions to incidents of trespass and alienation of land. The responses of the Islanders were initially aggressive in nature. Later, this aggressiveness was replaced by peaceful methods designed to incorporate desired aspects of the newly introduced way of life, such as material goods and outside technology, into the traditional lifestyle and culture. The Tiwi responses were those of a community which practised a relatively small but viable economy to encounters with representatives of several highly developed capitalist economies. In some instances these encounters were brief in duration, others were prolonged. To a lesser, but nevertheless important, degree were the reactions and attitudes of the Tiwi to the mainland Aborigines encountered in the course of the Islanders’ later history.

The distinctiveness of the Islander community is not only self-proclaimed. It is recognised and acknowledged by various representatives of the outside world with

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

good reason. Throughout the long, but mainly intermittent, period of recorded contact with various foreign influences the Tiwi clung strongly to their hunter-gather form of subsistence. This continued in the Cooper era and the mission period. Even the tribes and clans of coastal Arnhem Land were acculturated to a greater degree than the Tiwi. The Islanders' customary culture was modified mainly by the desire for metal tools and, eventually, dugout canoes. The Iwaidja influence extended to small additions to the Tiwi language and the belief in supernatural forces such as magic and death by man induced "poisoning", although Tiwi traditional lore offered them no way of understanding how these forces worked. In the years up to 1918 they accepted only what they wanted from the visitors and rejected whatever else they saw of the extraneous cultures. As for their indigenous customs, religion, language and material possessions, these were overwhelmingly unique in Aboriginal and Islander society. Similarities have been perceived between aspects of Tiwi culture and others in New Guinea, Timor and the Indonesian Archipelago. It is not possible to ascertain whether aspects of cultural change did come out of these societies or whether Tiwi culture developed in isolation and the similarities are coincidental. Arising from this debate, also, is the question, why, if cultural diffusion did occur, the Tiwi did not adopt more aspects of outside material culture? On another level, since 1824 comments have been made about the distinct physical features of the island community. A consensus exists among a number of observers as to people from Indonesia and New Guinea contributing to the racial make-up of the Islanders. Unfortunately, no study has been conducted to prove or disprove this supposition.

The past for the Tiwi progressed through isolation to intermittent contact to gradual movement into a fearful, final permanent relationship with other Aboriginal and Islander groups and the wider Australia. The history of the Tiwi is unique, not only in the form it took, but also in the level of impact on the Islander lifestyle. In contrast with most Aboriginal people, they suffered no population decline nor were women victimised, apart from those taken by the Iwaidja. Frontier conflict came to the islands, but on an occasional basis except for a short time under the British presence in the 1820s. They escaped the massacres, executions and imprisonments inflicted on various mainland groups. The climax of their cultural interaction with representatives of other societies was reached in the Cooper era and the early years of the Catholic Mission. There is no doubting the fact that Cooper and Gsell were, each in their way, driving forces which opened the wider world to the Tiwi on a permanent basis. Both are strongly situated in the collective memory of the adult Tiwi, but it is Father Gsell who stands to the forefront. Like Cooper he appreciated the culture of the Islanders but the buffalo-shooter's record is blemished in the eyes of the Tiwi both by his actions and those of his Iwaidja employees against some Tiwi. Gsell is seen in a different way, not just as a non-Aboriginal person who felt his way carefully around their customary lifestyle but also as one who did not bring violence to them and who did not interfere with their women. Overall, Father Gsell's policy of gradualism in any change to the traditional culture of the Tiwi proved to be effective in the decades beyond 1918. A large number of families were attracted to the mission. However, although Christianity had arrived in the islands under Gsell's policy it did not successfully penetrate the Tiwi community for some years. Gsell's approach to missionary work won favourable comment from officials and private visitors alike at a time when the criticism of missions stations was widespread.

Despite the view of some historians that indigenous Australians could not possess a sense of history in the wider Australian sense, or that of others who feel that historical

consciousness was weakly developed among Aborigines, the Tiwi display a concept of understanding and appreciating their ethnohistory. This is evident not only in their oral history but is strengthened by their depictions of aspects of their past in their material art and in their miming, singing and dancing. Furthermore, the celebration of highlights in their history through commemoration and the erection of several monuments effectively demonstrates that the Tiwi do have a strong sense of history as a lived empirical experience. They see their ethnohistory as being distinct from the history of their Creation Period.

How did the historical period treat the Tiwi? Little occurred to them in a physical sense. A small number lost their lives but they also killed or wounded some of the outsiders. For the Tiwi families residing in areas remote from the Asiatic or European newcomers there was little, if any, interruption to their normal lifestyle apart from some introduced illnesses in the early part of the current century. Even those who came into contact with the explorers, traders, shipwrecked people, and, in later years, the buffalo shooters and missionaries, retained their customs and beliefs. At Paru and Nguiu many of the Tiwi experienced associating with mainland Aborigines for the first time. The presence of Cooper and Father Gsell did not result in a physical loss of land, nor were the people forced to reside on the mission station. When they judged the circumstances to be suitable, the men brought their women and children to Nguiu of their own volition. They agreed to some of their sons and, later their daughters, attending school on the mission which led to the gradual demise of the initiation system. With Gsell's diplomatic encouragement the long tradition of inter-clan and band feuds changed their fighting techniques to reduce the possibility of fatal casualties. The Tiwi have now absorbed all of these events and happenings into the history of their community.

The Tiwi are a proud people. Instead of being angry about the conflict brought to their islands by European and Asian visitors, they have, in recent years, commemorated several of these events. Official celebrations, featuring visiting dignitaries, have been conducted to mark the anniversary of the establishment of Fort Dundas in 1824 and to remember the visit of Dutch explorers in 1705. Those in attendance included the Dutch Ambassador to Australia, representatives of the British military forces, the Administrator of the Northern Territory and members of the Royal Australian Navy. A monument at Nguiu records the visit in 1993 of Sir Benjamin Bathurst, Britain's First Sea Lord and a descendent of the Earl Bathurst, after whom Bathurst Island is named. The memories about visitors from the Indonesian Archipelago are of peaceful meetings, whereas archival records indicate incidents of Tiwi aggression against the trepang fishermen. In about 1988 the Tiwi welcomed participants in a canoe race from Bali to Darwin in remembrance of the sea voyages out of Indonesia to Australia by "Austronesian people 5000 years ago".

The approach of this study has been to seek the truth about the Tiwi and, in doing so, to discover the uniqueness of their society and the distinctiveness of their ethnohistory, that is of pre-contact culture and the exceedingly slow move towards changes in that culture. An "industry" of cultural and historical errors and exaggerations relating to the Tiwi commenced in the nineteenth century, and has continued to this day, appearing even in reputable publications. The pursuit of an accurate picture of Islander traditions and history has required research into a range of secondary material. Essential to the research has been Tiwi oral history and advice on customs which has identified a number of such widely published and widely believed inaccuracies. They were not

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

disorganised by their introduction to outside influences. Instead, they remained strongly motivated towards retaining much of their customary lifestyle and customs. With the assistance of a culturally sensitive mission and, later, of sympathetic officials, the Tiwi moved towards the time when they would be known officially as the most contented indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

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- ¹ Egan, *op. cit.*; Morris, John, "An Outline of the History of the Settlement at Fort Wellington, Raffles Bay, N.T.". In *Fort Wellington, Raffles Bay, North Australia*, Darwin: Historical Society of the Northern Territory Incorporated, 1971, pp. 14 - 40; and Berndt and Berndt (1954), *op. cit.*, cover various aspects of inter-racial contact and confrontation on the northern coast of Australia.
 - ² Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
 - ³ Krastins, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3.
 - ⁴ See, for instance, Price, A. Grenfell, *White Settlers and Native Peoples*, Melbourne: Georgian House, 1949, pp. 1-2; Elkin, A.P., "Reaction and Interaction: A Food Gathering People and European Settlement in Australia". In *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 53, No. 2, 1951, pp. 166-170; Gale, Fay, *A Study of Assimilation: Part Aborigines in South Australia*, Adelaide: Libraries Board of South Australia, 1964, p. 85; Stanner, W.E.H., *After The Dreaming*, Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1968, pp. 7-8.
 - ⁵ Broome, Richard, *Aboriginal Australians*, Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1982, Chapters 2-7.
 - ⁶ Attwood, Bain, *The Making of the Aborigines*, North Sydney: Allen and Unwin Australia, 1989, Chapters 1-5 illustrates the relationship between missionaries on several stations in Victoria and the Aborigines institutionalised on those missions.
 - ⁷ *The Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.
 - ⁸ Reynolds, *op. cit.*, p. 5.
 - ⁹ *Ibid*, p. 1.
 - ¹⁰ *Ibid*.

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Index

- Allen, F.J., 54
Ampiji (Rainbow Serpent), 16, 115
Arnhem Land, 2, 3, 12, 14, 19-21, 30, 32, 60-62, 66, 73, 104, 108
- Barker, Capt. C., 61
Barlow, Capt. M., 45, 46, 48
Barnes, W., 46
Basedow, Dr. H., 12, 30, 66, 88-89, 91
Baudin, N.T., 29, 35, 37
Beagle, 68
Beagle Bay Mission, 113
Beatrice, 82
Beatty, W., 22-23
Beckett, J.T., 95, 123
Benison, L., 87-88
Bertolini, Rev. J., 115
Bevan, Judge D.D., 95
Birdsell, J., 16
Breinl, Dr. A., 93
Bremer, Capt. J.G., 18, 41, 43-45, 52
Briggs, A., 81, 91
British voyagers, 4, 5, 35-36
Buffalo, 85, 92, 95
Buffalo shooters, 4, 6, 8; *see also* Cooper, R.J.
Burston, Dr. R., 92
- Campbell, Major J., 16, 34-35, 46-48, 50-52, 54, 63
Carey, H.E., 9
Catholic Mission, 4, 6, 104, 111-125, 136
Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, 3
Chinese trepangers, 72
Chinese voyagers, 5, 34
Clune, F., 16
Cobourg Peninsula, 18, 44, 47, 51, 53-54, 61, 66, 81, 83, 96, 118
Conigrave, C. P., 91
Cook, Dr. C., 53
Coon, C.S., 16
Cooper (Tiwi), 85
Cooper, "Old", (Tiwi), 85
- Cooper, A.R., 81-82, 95
Cooper, H., 80, 83-84, 89, 100
Cooper, J., 93
Cooper, Paddy Minidji, 85
Cooper, R., 96, 118
Cooper, R.J. (Joe), 22, 73, 79-96, 104, 106, 109-110, 116-118, 124, 136-137
Cooper, T., 95
Corris, P., 1
Cosgrove, Rev. J., 85
Countess of Harcourt, 41
Courbon, Rev. R., 94, 115, 117
Creation Period (*Palingarrî*), 1, 2, 7, 14-16, 19-21, 29, 69, 137.
Croll, R.H., 124
Crossman, J., 79
Crush, T., 108
- Daly River, 73, 92, 105
Darling, Governor R., 57
Davidson, D.S., 61, 65
Denny, W.J., 108
Docker, E.G., 16
Donovan, P., 121
Dreamtime, 15
Durack, M., 108
Dutch explorers, 5, 29, 31, 133, 137; *see also* Pieterzoon and van Delft
- Earl, G.W., 16, 34-35
Emo, Rev. N., 125
Ennis, H., 17, 42-43
Emabella Mission, 113
Essington, 83
Ethel, 85, 95-96, 106
Eyre, E.J., 107
- Finlayson, H.H., 125
Flowerdale, 81
Flying Fish, H.M.S., 68
Flynn, J. (Barney), 73, 81-83
Flynn, Rev. F., 16-17

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

- Forbes, J. (Timor Joe), 48
Forrest, P., 32-33
Fort Dumaresq, 54
Fort Dundas, 4-5, 17-18, 20, 35, 38, 41-56, 60, 70, 73, 137
Fort Point, 5, 69
Fort Wellington, 44, 51, 53-54, 61
Frederick's Town, 54
French voyagers, 5, 35; *see also* Baudin
Fry, Dr. H.K., 93
- Galiwinku (Elcho Island), 110,
Garr, M., 111
Gee, L.C.E., 54, 91
Giles, A., 104
Gillen, F.J., 104-105, 112
Giltruth, J., 90, 93, 95, 109, 118, 121
Gold, Dr. J., 51
Goodale, J.C., 11, 14, 32, 73, 88, 95, 115, 121
Goodliff, C., 72
Grassby, A., 48
Green, J., 51
Green, S., 93, 96
Green, Sam (Tiwi), 85
Gsell, Bishop F.X., 21, 62, 68, 88, 91, 95, 97, 104-125, 136-137
Gunditjmarra, 12
Gunn, A., 114
- Halls, C., 32-33
Harney, W.E., 10, 55
Harris, J., 111
Hart, C.W.M., 11, 13-14, 16, 18, 21, 32, 62, 73, 88, 121
Hartley, Capt. H.R., 46, 52-53
health problems, 92-93
Henschke, Rev. W., 89, 119
Herbert, C.E., 106
Hermannsburg Mission, 107, 112, 114
Hicks, Lt. W., 51
Hicks, S., 51
Hill, E., 53
Hill, M., 48
Hingston, J.P., 71-72
Hoff, J., 18
Holmes, Dr. M., 93, 95
Holtze-Playford Expedition, 110
Horn Expedition, 112
House, J., 18
Hunt, A., 93
- Ingeruintamirri, Samuel, 83-84
Iwaidja, 11, 18, 22, 73, 79, 81-82, 84, 87-89, 91, 95-96, 104, 136
- James, B., 35
Jarratt, P., 53
Jesuit Missions, 105, 111
Johns, Cons., J.R., 93
Johnson (Tiwi), 85
- Kerinaiuua (Senior), 69
Kerinaiuua, Cardo (Kartu), 85, 87
Kerinaiuua, Jerry, 64, 68-69, 83, 91, 93, 95-96, 118
King, M., 30
King, P.P., 6, 29, 34-38, 41, 43, 61-62
Klaatsch, H., 20, 85, 90
Klarka-tu, 88
Knight, J.G., 105
Krastins, V., 83, 115, 133
Kudjaliamo, 95
Kulama, 20-21, 46
Kunmunya Mission, 113, 125
Kyle-Little, S., 2
- Lady Nelson*, 41, 46, 48, 55
Lakatui, 88
Larrakia, 11, 22, 68-69, 84, 96
Lee, H., 109
Lee, J., 11, 121
legislation, 89, 108, 116
Lockwood, D., 45
Lombadina Mission, 125
Lorraine (convict), 43
Love, Rev. J.R.B., 114, 125
Lucy Ann, 53
- MacArthur, Capt., J., 52
Macassans (Indonesians/Malays), 5, 16, 35, 37, 45, 54-56, 60-67, 72, 137
Macknight, C., 61, 65-66
Malay Bay, 62, 81-82, 96, 118
Maningrida, 62
Marrupwantatila, 63
Mary Elizabeth, 51
Matchalimpa (Tiwi-Larrakia), 22
Maung, 84
McBryde, I., 1
McCarthy, F.D., 30
McGrath, Rev. J., 115
Meeston, A., 54, 79
Melville Island Ltd., 96
Melville Island suggested as reserve, 92
Mindaroli (Macassan-Tiwi), 64
Minjilang, 108
Miringilaja, 20
Mitchell, S.J., 108, 114
Moran, Cardinal, 105
Moravian missionaries, 110
Mountford, C.P., 11, 20, 55, 62, 65
Munkara, Mariano., 114, 115
Munkara, Turimpi, 70
Mura-tarna, 85, 95
Murimbata, 12
Murray, Sir G., 53
Murtankula, 14, 19-20, 23
Murugualaki, 65
- Nelson, H., 118
New Norcia Mission, 112
Ngaringari, John (Iwaidja), 82, 87, 91

- Nouyoux, Rev. E., 115, 117
 Nowaringu (Iwaidja), 85, 87
- O'Connor, M., 83
 O'Reilly, Archbishop, 108
 Olsen, S., 10
 Osborne, C., 11-12, 14, 18, 20, 66
- Palmerston Stockade (Escape Cliffs), 5, 68-69, 72
 Pamanano (Macassan), 61
 Parsons, J.L., 53, 68, 71-72, 105
 pearling, 72, 133
 Pedro (Filipino), 111
 Phillip, Gov. A., 44, 52
 Piantiringilla, Jimmy Illatumi, 64
 Piantiringilla, Tipilatjimirri, 64
 Piantiringilla, Topsy, 14
 Pieterzoon, P., 31
 Pilling, A.R., 11, 14, 32, 35, 62, 69-70, 73, 82, 88, 95, 115
 Pipiarmireeyung, 95
 Plymouth Brethren, 114
 Poignant, R., 88
 Pool (Poel), G., 31
 Porkilari (Senior), 72, 82
 Porkilari, Paddy, 62, 63, 66, 72, 83, 92
 Port Essington, 4 10, 53, 81, 95, 96, 118; *see also* Victoria
 Portaminni, Argau, 119, 122
 Portuguese seafarers, 5, 31
 Portuguese slave raids, 29, 34-36, 41, 50
 Powell, A., 32, 34-35
 Price, A.G., 111-113
 Price, E.W., 7
Pukumani, 14, 20-22, 46, 55
 Pukwiu, Carmel, 89
 Pupajua, Allan, 63
 Purrukuparli, 14, 16, 23, 69
 Puruntatameri, Paula, 11
 Puruntatameri, Paw Paw, 114
 Pye, Bro. J., 63, 67
- Reid, G., 107
 Reynolds, H., 1, 135
 Riolo, Daeng, 61
 Roberts, J., 53
 Robinson, F., 45, 48, 50, 53
 Robinson, E.O., 63, s71-73, 81, 83, 91-91, 106
 Roe, J.S., 42-43, 45, 62
 Romolo (Filipino), 111
 Rowley, C., 113
 Roper River Mission, 114
- St. Francis*, 119
 Saunders, P., 71
 Savaldo, Bishop R., 112, 114
 Sayers, D.M., 85, 90
 Searcy, A., 61, 64, 66, 71, 82
 Serano, P., 111
 shipwrecks, 67-68
- Simpson, C., 62
 Somerset, 54
 South Australian Select Committee, 104, 113
 Sowden, W.J., 104
 Spencer, W.B., 11, 14, 16, 19-20, 30, 79-80, 85, 89-93, 104, 109, 113-114
 Spillett, P., 63-64
 Stanley, O., 35, 85
Stedcombe, 48, 55
 Stretton, W.G., 95, 105
 Sunter, G.H., 79-80
- Tamar*, H.M.S., 4
 Tampu, 51
 Tapara, 69
 Tasman, A., 32
 Thomson, D.F., 2
 Tindale, N.B., 16
 Tiperangkatanni, 88
 Tipiloura, Ku-pollie, 111
 Tipiluntiana, Malacca Jack, 118
 Tipuamantimirri, Merapanui, 119
 Tipulatjimotipa, 64
 Tipuranginamirri, 85
 Tipurawuta, 88
 Tiwi Islanders, culture, 17-18, 23, 23, 29-30, 104; description, 16-18; language, 20; political divisions, 11-13, 15; population, 11
 Tiwi Islands: geography, 10; local name, 13
 Trower, H.M., 123
 Tuarutjuua, 88
 Tupurualaua, 89
- Ungaraminingamo, Topsy Martina, 119, 121-122, 125
 Ulungura, Matthias, 68, 72
 Ulungura (Senior), 72
 Urenchi, 82
 Uroongee, 82
- Vesteys, 94
 van Delft, M., 32-33, 37, 65
 Vernon Islands, 11
 Victoria (Port Essington), 44, 52-54
- Wa Hoi*, 84
 Wadeye (Port Keats) 110
Wanganui, 68
 Ward, E., 72
 Waters, Inspector N., 92, 108
 Webb, R., 93
 Welfare Branch, 108
 Wellington Mission, 113
 Wilding, W.B., 70
 Willey, K., 21
 Williams, C., 93
 Wilson, T.B., 52, 54
 Witsen, Burgomaster, 31
 Woolna (Woolner), 11, 68-70, 84, 96
 World War Two, 12

The Tiwi: From Isolation to Cultural Change

Worms, Rev. E., 30, 66
Wuninkadoo, 22

Yair-a-kart (Iwaidja), 64
York, B., 45, 48, 50, 53